





THE OCTAVE OF CLAUDIUS

SECOND EDITION.

THE
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BY
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TO MY WIFE

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CHAPTER I.

MRS. WYCHERLEY was not quite old. She seemed always to be keeping one foot on the tail of her youth; the poor thing squeaked, but could not quite break away. In her conversation she would often drag you, all tremulous, with her into the confessional, where you found, to your disappointment, that she had no sins, only errors of diet. She was by way of being a woman of the world, with the world left out. Its place in her Ereiston Square *salon* was taken by the world's understudies. Henry Burnage, who for years had made her *salon* a habit, would torture himself at times with the thought that he was only a fashionable man's understudy; but the torture did not persist, for his opinion of himself was

high and on the whole stable. Of the under-studies there were many ; her rooms were full on Sunday evening. Mr. Wycherley would be seen there sometimes ; he sat in corners, and was mildly disapproving ; he made the money, and Mrs. Wycherley spent it. Still, he acknowledged that his daughter Angela must have every chance, and the *salon* was in some sense a chance. More often Mr. Wycherley did not show himself. He liked to take a walk on Sunday evenings, and he frequently took it. He had a dislike, not wholly irrational, to the *salon*. Reason was a strong point with him.

“Be rational, Jessica,” he would frequently say to his wife. “I only ask you to be rational.”

When he went his walk, she alluded to his headache. Nobody minded. He was not the attraction, neither was she, and they both knew it ; but Angela wore pink, and under-studies attract one another. Angela petted her papa a good deal ; and, in return, he never mentioned anything in which he was seriously

and commercially interested. In public she would sometimes talk to him with endearing facetiousness; this mildly puzzled him—he only dealt in the milder sensations—because in private she rarely tried to talk brightly to him.

Mrs. Wycherley's drawing-room was not in itself wonderful. The walls were covered with a paper that had a dado to it; she had ordered it some years ago herself, and she regretted it. She knew now that it had been premature, and that a paper-with-a-dado did not constitute art's last word with regard to wall-decoration. Mr. Wycherley did not think the times were yet ripe for it to be superseded. He had said so more than once. Mrs. Wycherley rather believed in what she called "those pretty trifles that make a room look bright;" so she concocted some flower-holders out of Japanese fans and some velvet that had been on the dress that she had worn when Maria was married. These things afterwards were transferred to a spare and permanently unoccupied bedroom. It was thought that

Angela had been responsible for their removal. Angela considered that the room was irredeemable, and thought that cheap attempts at redemption humiliated her.

It was late one evening. Mrs. Wycherley's guests had all gone ; she had interviewed the hired man in the hall, paid him, swung back into the room again with a declaration that Jameson was invaluable, and now sat down in her rocking-chair, facing her daughter, fanning herself rather vehemently with a fan that had been mended.

" Oh yes, Angela, you may say what you like, but there's never any need to tell Jameson anything. Why he goes on the job instead of taking a permanent place is more than I can imagine. He's just the picture of the perfect butler."

" All right, mamma, all right ! " said Angela, rather irritably. " He does, but you needn't think that he deceives anybody."

" I don't wish that he should, dear ; far from it. The queen herself may know that he's hired for the evening for all that I care.

When one is entertaining a great number of people, one supplements one's staff. The very best people have to do it."

"Yes," drawled Angela, "but they have a staff to supplement. Ah, if we were only *quite* poor!"

"Angela, that is really wicked! If you dislike our means—our moderate means—you would dislike poverty still more. We do our best, and it's too ungrateful of you. Mind, I don't say that I am not fond of a little society myself——"

"Oh, mamma, dear! don't be intolerable!"

"I don't know what you mean. But I do know that it's chiefly for your sake that your father consents to these Sunday evenings. And you know that it's the dream of our lives to see you happily married—like Maria. Poverty would be to you Life's Greatest Curse."

"Mr. Burnage told me to-night that he thought families whose income just touched the four figures really had the hardest fight against vulgarity; but he added, from

conjecture and a subsequent politeness, that all things were possible to genius. We have the fatal income without the genius, I fancy."

"Ah, Mr. Burnage is one of these rather clever young men. I don't understand 'em. But he looks very well in a room. Angela, my dear, I must hunt myself up a little supper. I hadn't any. I dare not eat when I'm feeling nervous. It only means that I wake with a fluttering in my side and feel as if the angel of death had summoned me. I'll just go into the dining-room and see what I can rescue."

She returned in a minute with a champagne-bottle—still loyal to the third of its contents—and a plate and small tumbler. On the plate was a cold cutlet in aspic, and a silver fork; on the portion of the plate which still remained untenanted were two chocolate *éclair*s. She was careful to keep the aspic clear of the *éclair*s until their turn came; she ate rather greedily. Angela looked genuinely distressed.

“Honesty is a poor word for Jameson,” Mrs. Wycherley remarked as she filled her glass. “Any other man would have finished the bottle. You can trust him; that’s what I feel so much about Jameson. As a tonic for the stomach I believe that there’s nothing——”

“Oh, mamma, mamma!” said Angela suddenly, “why do we keep on fighting? I used to love our parties once, but I’m getting to know things. We’re ridiculous. We aren’t quite what we want to be, and we are the more absurd because in some things we are so very near it. I don’t think I want to marry. I used to, but I don’t now. I certainly don’t want to marry any of the underbred young men who come to this house and fall in love with me. I often wonder why I go on trying to be bright and amusing to them, and why I do my best to cover up the rough places and make things go smoothly, and cajole papa, and dress as well as I can. The hell—the awful hell of this London life!” And poor Angela buried

her head in a recently purchased cushion, and began to sob a little.

“You distress me,” said Mrs. Wycherley, excitedly; “I can’t bear to see you like this, Angela. I insist that you shall not sob. I *cannot* digest when my mind is disturbed. Poor Angela! do be comforted!”

Angela sat up, and dried her eyes in silence. Her brief storm had passed.

“You’re feeling low,” Mrs. Wycherley continued decisively. “Now, be guided by me, and take something. There are some of these *éclair*s still left, you may just as well have one; you know what things with cream in them are like on the second day. And chocolate’s sustaining—now do. And that,” she said, suddenly breaking off as she heard a sound at the front door, “is your father’s latch-key. Don’t let him come in and find you like this.”

By the time that Mr. Wycherley had entered, Angela had composed herself. Mr. Wycherley was short and bald, with a slight tendency towards rotundity.

"I have had such a walk," he said, with enthusiastic satisfaction, as he took a distinctly uncomfortable chair. "I went as far as Putney by an omnibus, just as I said I would, then I struck across the common—wonderful place!—round by the mill (thinking about Richmond, you know), and then off to the left into Wimbledon (changed my mind, you see). From Wimbledon I took train to Waterloo, and walked to the club. I found Bodgers there, and we split a bottle of old port. Bodgers would pay. I hope you've all enjoyed yourselves as much as I have."

"It's been a most successful evening," said Mrs. Wycherley.

"Do you like the new champagne, Jessica?"

"On the whole I think it an improvement."

"Sixpence a bottle cheaper—that's what it is. Be reasonable, Jessica, and don't pretend to know anything about anything. There kiss me, and good night, Angela; it's time you were off to bed." His lips smacked on her forehead, hers brushed his cheek

"Sixpence a bottle cheaper," he murmured to himself again, and went off with a mild approach to hilarity.

Mrs. Wycherley turned once more to her daughter. She was feeling quite optimistic.

"I notice, Angela, that you talk a good deal to Henry Burnage."

"Do I? I'm glad you mentioned it, mamma. I won't do it in future. As a rule, I talk to any one who isn't talking to any one else."

"I haven't a word to say against your manner. It isn't the old-school, stately manner exactly."

Angela leant forward, her elbows resting on her knees, her pretty face—she was not nearly as pretty as she looked—framed by her warm little hands. At this point she interrupted her mother—

"Dear mamma, I'm a flirt. When you can't be what you want to be, it's a kind of baby's consolation to be the thing you hate most. But you must not deceive yourself. It occasionally seems to me that Henry Burnage is less foolish and rather better bred

than the average here ; but don't imagine that I love him. And he's not in the least in love with me."

"Well, he's been here, off and on, for years. He must be a good deal taken by us. I don't say that, as a rule, I would recommend a girl to marry a young commencing barrister. No, no ! I'm not so unwise as that. But Mr. Burnage has means, independent means. I ask you to look at the way his rooms are furnished. You may call them what you like, but I call them gorgeous. And then he entertains—not so frequently as we do, nor on so large a scale."

"But so infinitely better," said Angela, fervently.

"There ! you're defending him ; what does that mean ?"

"It does mean that I tolerate him, and it does not mean that I love him. I know what you want, and it couldn't be done. Why, if he kissed me, or if I thought even that he wanted to kiss me, I should go quite mad—mad with disgust."

“Oh, Angela, darling !” said Mrs. Wycherley. “You know that I wouldn’t force you into anything. There, good night ! We must not sit up any longer, or what will your father say ? You’ll come directly, won’t you ?”

At the drawing-room door she paused a moment, and looked almost beseechingly at her daughter.

“Angela,” she said, “I believe that I’ve had one *éclair* too many.”

CHAPTER II.

IF Mr. Wycherley had taken his stroll over Wimbledon Common later in the evening, he would have had an opportunity to play the part of the Good Samaritan. There is no *rôle* which is more popular; the feelings of self-satisfaction and superiority help to make life enjoyable, and in consequence it is delightful to rescue. But to be rescued is quite another affair. The thing which is condemned as ingratitude is often a very natural resentment of one who has been placed compulsorily under an obligation. Most men, given a certain amount of sensitiveness, would sooner fall among thieves than among good Samaritans.

The chance which Mr. Wycherley lost was taken by Dr. Gabriel Lamb. The doctor was

returning home rather late ; it was already beginning to get dark. When he was within a few yards of the garden-gate of his own house, he noticed a young man lying in an awkward position on the grass by the road-side. Dr. Gabriel Lamb bent over him, found him half-conscious, and made a cursory examination of him.

The young man was clad in a well-cut tweed suit, worn to utter shabbiness. His boots were in holes. He was lying where he had fallen when he found that he could go no further ; his hat was off, and had received from the fall a damage with which it was already familiar. His face was thin, and at present quite colourless, but it had the tokens of refinement and strength.

Dr. Lamb's examination lasted less than a minute. "I shall be back directly," he said, and began to run towards his own house. He was a middle-aged man. His head, save for a fringe of reddish hair all round it, was bald ; but he was very active. He dashed up the garden drive and into the house ; here he

gave one or two rapid orders to servants, and hurriedly prepared what he wanted. In a very few minutes he was out on the roadway again, with a glass in his hand, bending over the young man. The doctor's servant had accompanied him, and stood at a few yards' distance, waiting.

The young man's eyes were half closed. When the doctor held the glass to his lips, he turned his head away impatiently.

"Drink it at once!" said the doctor, sharply. "Do you want to die?"

The young man spoke in a faint whisper, and with some difficulty.

"Not a beggar. I'm much obliged—very natural mistake of yours. I—I'd rather you left me alone."

"I won't, then. Whoever heard such nonsense? Any man who is taken suddenly ill accepts help from the first stranger who is not too much of a brute to give it him. It's no question of begging. Damn it!" he went on, getting furious, "you shall pay for the ha'porth of brandy, if you like—but drink it."

The young man shook his head. "No money," he murmured, "that's why I'm——" The effort at explanation seemed to be too much for him, and he stopped.

"All right, then, I'll take your clothes, or you shall work for me ; at any rate, I promise you that I will put you under no obligation which you cannot repay. I swear it. Now then."

The young man drank the contents of the glass ; in a moment or two his eyes opened wider. He looked reflective.

"That wasn't brandy," he said. His voice was already a shade stronger.

"Not brandy alone. There were other things in it. I'm a doctor, you know. Now, do you see that house ? "

The young man raised himself into a sitting position, looked at it, and nodded his head.

"That's my house, and I'm going to take you there, with the help of my servant. Then you'll be put to bed. In a day or two you'll be all right. Now, you must place yourself entirely in my hands and trust to

me. I'm not going to put you under any obligation. You shall work out your debt. You look like an educated man."

"Eton and Cambridge—but you couldn't believe it."

"I believe it entirely. Now then, you shall get up. Steady!—there, that's it! Now, slowly."

Supported—almost carried—by the doctor and his servant, the young man was taken into the house. It was a house which seemed to have an old quiet in it—a quiet that had long been there. The colours in the interior were low; it was lit softly and without glare; one's footsteps were not heard on the thick carpets. The house was of red brick; but the red had been softened and shaded by time, and the walls were partly covered with ivy. At the back of the house there was a modern addition, which Dr. Lamb had erected for his own purposes. It was a long, low building, and had a separate entrance into the garden.

The young man found himself in a large and very comfortable bedroom. At one end

of the room there was a door into a bath-room, at the other end the room communicated with a dressing-room and a small study. Here the doctor's servant did for him all that a valet could do for a man. Soon he was lying in bed, refreshed by a bath, soothed by the luxuriousness that he had missed so much and for so long, dreamingly wondering whether it could be all true. He had suffered very much, and this sudden change for the better seemed so strange. He thought half-amusedly that the doctor had done a foolish thing; he had taken into his house a man of whom he knew nothing, except that he had found him, a mere vagrant, shabby and fainting from exhaustion and want of food. But the young man reflected that in the course of his life he had frequently been trusted like this—on sight. Certainly, in some way or other, he must repay the doctor. How, he could not imagine. It did not matter—the doctor had promised to find a way for him. But the doctor's kindness and trust were, he felt, beyond repayment. He

began to wonder if they would bring him something to eat; he hoped so. The valet had left the lamp and the candles by his bedside alight, so it seemed certain that he would return. The valet had treated him with the utmost respect, as an honoured guest, and not as a relieved vagabond. If he ever got any money, he would remember the man. Presently the door opened, and the doctor and the servant entered. The servant carried a small tray, on which were a cup of chocolate and two sandwiches, made of toast and some kind of meat-jelly. While the young man was eating (he was ordered to eat slowly) the doctor sat down by the bedside and began to talk to him. At first he was merely medical, then he said—

“My name, you know, is Lamb. I’m Dr. Gabriel Lamb. May I ask what your name is?”

“Mine is Claudius Sandell. I really don’t know how to thank you.”

“Not a word, not a word, if you please.”

“Words would certainly be of very little

good. I hope that I have not been keeping you from any other patients."

The doctor smiled. "Oh, I don't practise," he said. "It was lucky for you—and I think it lucky for me also—that you chose a Sunday evening for your collapse. I only walk on Sunday evenings—chiefly because it is not church. Ah, yes—quite true—there is church also on Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon, and on certain occasions in the week! My wife—to whom I hope soon to introduce you—attends every service; she also stays for the after-meetings. You must not, by the way, think that I am an unbeliever. I am not; at one time I always went to church on Sunday evenings, and there was much in it that I enjoyed. But the curate's banalities, the superstitiousness of the people, and the perfectly evil singing of the choir vexed me. Then it occurred to me that if I went for a walk on Sunday evening instead, I could get the service without the church. I could have the sunset and the aspirations, the longings for the far-away that it produces."

He stopped abruptly, and noticed that the servant was listening with rather a puzzled face. He turned to him.

“Wait outside, Francis,” he said.

When the man had retired, the doctor began to pace the room, and went on talking. Under his very thick sandy eyebrows and long lashes his grey eyes grew luminous.

“Sometimes it’s in the spring. Damn it! there’s nothing like a spring evening. I’m in earnest about it. The poetry of it is so strenuous and yet so quiet; so full of fresh life, and yet so full of the old peace that still passes all understanding. But it’s always as the service of God that I take my Sunday evening walk. I love the lime-trees—trees of the Pentecost—with their leaves turning to tongues of fire as they shake under the strokes of wind and sunlight. I love the cold purity of the sky on winter evenings that get dark so soon. How all the stars look at one! The heavens declare the glory of God. Ah! I’m talking far too much!”

Claudius was watching him with keen

interest. "No, no," he said, "go on, I'm beginning to understand."

"That really is all—only on Sunday evenings do I walk, because it is not church but is service. The rest of my time is given to work."

"To work, doctor? But you said that you did not practise."

"Quite so, I do not, although, when I was a younger man, I had a practice for a time. It did not content me. One night I was rung up by a woman; I went downstairs and found her hysterical on the door-steps. She pulled herself together, and prayed me to come at once to see her son who was dying. She lived about a mile off. We ran a good deal; she was distressed and I was sympathetic. When we got there, I found that the boy was not dying, but was slightly bilious. Then I asked myself if that kind of thing was science as I loved it—if it really assisted the great cause of humanity for which alone I live. I gave up my practice. I study the individual man only when he is likely to throw light on

the aggregate. I never work on behalf of the individual. But I tire you."

"No, I am not tired."

"Pardon me, but you are. It is merely the effect of the restorative that makes you feel strong, and that effect will pass off. You are very much run down, and you need rest. You would perhaps like something more to eat; I shall not give it you. To-morrow you shall be better treated. Good night, Mr. Sandell, good night!"

When he got to the door, he paused a moment, and said, "Do the clothes you were wearing fit you perfectly?"

"Very fairly—it's about all you can say for them. I have got thinner since they were made."

"That's all right. A tailor can make others from them, I suppose: it will save you the bother of measurements. Good night, again."

Before Claudius could answer, the doctor had gone. In the passage, outside the room, Dr. Lamb was detained for a minute by the valet.

“Excuse me, sir, but I’ve seen this Mr. Sandell before.”

“Where?”

“At Cambridge. I was a gyp at Trinity, sir, you remember, before I came to you. This Mr. Sandell was really there; it’s quite true what he said.”

“Don’t make that mistake again,” said Dr. Lamb, somewhat impressively. “When I told you, a few minutes ago, that Mr. Sandell was my guest, it ceased to be necessary for you to give him a character for truthfulness, or sobriety, or early rising, or anything else. You will sleep in the dressing-room, in case Mr. Sandell should want you during the night. If he is unable to sleep, or turns faint again, you know what to do, but he won’t. I shall want you to go to town to-morrow for me; you must go early. I will give you your orders immediately after breakfast.”

As Dr. Lamb was coming down the stairs, a carriage drove up to the door. Mrs. Lamb had come back from the after-meeting. She placed on the hall table two or three devotional

books : amongst them was her Bible, fastened by an elastic band, and bulged with sheets of written notes. She was rather a short woman, with dark hair, and plain anæmic face and ecstatic eyes. She looked very young, twenty years younger than the doctor.

“I’m late,” she said to him, “but I’ve been very happy—so happy ! We had Mr. Catcome as usual—Elijah and the believer’s hope.”

Dr. Lamb looked at his wife, and said nothing ; then he smiled slightly. When he smiled his thin lips showed rather large white teeth. She saw the smile, and a nervous expression came into her face ; she appeared to be slightly afraid of her husband.

They went into the dining-room. At a small table supper was laid ; and they both sat down. Mrs. Lamb said grace audibly, while her husband stared pensively at a mayonnaise.

CHAPTER. III.

MRS. LAMB's want of tact was so pronounced that it even overcame her fear of her husband, and she still spoke about the service of the church and the great good that she had received from it; he listened politely with attention, occasionally looking up from his plate at her, almost inquisitively. At each glance from under the thick sandy eyebrows, and at each slight smile that showed the big white teeth, she faltered. The glance and smile had a kind of reserved meaning in them; they forced her into the exasperating belief that she was being treated with superiority. She was half-inclined to lose her temper—did, indeed, for one moment cut the chicken-wing on her plate as if it had been an enemy—but commanded herself. She was not a very

clever woman, emotional, half-fanatical, with the pathetic want to be good.

Dr. Lamb said very little until supper was over, and his few remarks to his wife were commonplace enough. As she rose from the table, he said—

“I’ve told them to take the coffee to my room to-night. I can’t talk comfortably in these big rooms, and I’ve got some news for you. Will you come, Hilda?”

“Yes, dear, in one minute.”

He held open the door for her, she passed into the hall. He stood a moment reflective; his brows were slightly wrinkled. He did not like the substitution of a late cold supper for dinner at the usual time; but it marked Sunday for Hilda. He did not like Hilda to sit down to an evening meal in an afternoon dress, with her hat on; but it marked Sunday for her. This interested him slightly; he wondered how her observation of Sunday would work out when her day came. There had been signs lately (he had noted them all as they came) that her day was very near.

He crossed the hall and went down a corridor to the two rooms which constituted the addition which he had made to the house. The first of these rooms was furnished as a study ; the walls were covered with books, most of them books of the advanced scientist, some of them books that even an advanced scientist would have classed as heterodox, the work of charlatans. It was brightly lighted ; on a side table the coffee and liqueurs had been placed all ready. At one end of the room was a door leading into the laboratory. The doctor opened the door and looked in ; the laboratory was in darkness, but he reached his hand upward to a button in the wall and switched on the electric light. The lamps reflected themselves on polished mahogany cases and on the bell-glass that protected a large microscope from the dust. There was rather an unpleasant smell in the room. Shelves and cabinets were ranged all round the walls ; in one corner stood a lead-covered table ; on another table stood two or three bottles and a measuring glass. The doctor put the bottles back in

their places on the shelves, and washed the glass at a square stone basin. He had used the things in preparing the restorative. Then he switched off the electric light and went back into the study again, closing the door behind him. Here he sat down, poured out his coffee, tilted a little glass of Cognac into it, lit a cigarette, and began to think.

He really had a very great deal to think about that night.

He was interrupted, however, almost immediately, by the entrance of his wife. She had changed her dress, and was wearing a loose black tea-gown. It suited her fairly well, and her pale face had now a pretty tinge of colour in it. Dr. Lamb looked at her critically.

"You've changed," he began.

"Yes, I saw you weren't liking the other."

"Ah!" said Dr. Lamb, "that's good of you. It's the curse of the individual that such trifles should matter to him. There's nothing so small in the impulses of collected humanity, the aggregate. Mankind," he continued, speaking more to himself than to

her, "is so great, and isolated man's so small."

"You had something to tell me," Hilda said timidly.

"Ah, yes." He told her how he had found Claudius Sandell, and taken him into the house. It was his intention to keep him for a few days—perhaps weeks—to provide him with clothes, and so on. "He says that he must repay me—cannot bear the obligation—is very strong on that point."

"Gabriel, this is one of the queerest things you have done. Of course, it is very kind of you, and I must say that many professing Christians would have been quite content just to have given the man a copper—or a sixpence."

"He would not have taken it; and in that condition it would have been no good to him if he had taken it."

"No? It was so silly of him not to want to be helped; I rather like him for that. Quite dark hair, you said—and tall, I imagine him. Well, I hope it will turn out all right.

But you have done almost more than you need. The best suite of rooms in the house, and in every way the treatment of an honoured guest !”

“Quite so. Apart from the fact that a gentleman cannot very well take advantage of another gentleman’s poverty in order to humiliate him, there are reasons. You will oblige me by treating him exactly as I have done—as an honoured guest.”

“I will do anything to please you,” she said humbly.

“And I must confess that I like you better in this docile mood than in the mood which it has replaced. When you came back to the house to-night, you addressed me as if I were an atheist, which was incorrect of you—as I have frequently explained. You also spoke to me about the curate and Elijah, and the believer’s hope, and you are quite aware that I do not discuss such subjects with you. Your God is the projection of the curate upon the average feminine intelligence ; you believe in your heart that your God wrote the whole

Bible in English and got it published by Bagster. I cannot share your conception or your view; but I am not an atheist. I love God; that is the reason why I love and serve to the uttermost His humanity, and would sacrifice any unit of it in the cause of the aggregate. Now this must be the last time. I leave you your intellectual freedom and you may go to church, but you shall not talk church."

"Gabriel, did you love me when you married me?"

Her downcast eyes were raised and looked full at his.

"I am a man of like passions to others."

"You made me happy, you know. It was a life of sordid drudgery at home—papa was always overworked and mamma was always tired, and there was that trouble with my sister Matilda. You gave me all that money could give. And then"—she gasped and caught her breath—"our child!"

"Well, go on!"

"Now I don't know whether you love me

or not—I don't even know whether I love you, because I am afraid of you so. But I know that there's a change. You used even to go to church with me. You were not always locked up in the laboratory. Even now you are good to me ; you give me more money than I can spend ; you give me presents ; you are considerate for me, and do things to please me. But I'm shut out of your real life. Oh, Gabriel, I hate science !”

“ You should not do that, dear,” said the doctor, blandly. “ My interest in you is largely scientific.”

“ Don't !” she said, pathetically, not irritably. “ Don't look at me as if I were a specimen. Don't be just interested in me. I'm a woman. It wasn't for the money and comfort that I married you. I loved you. You loved me once, Gabriel ; science did not stand first ; you used to make concessions to me.”

“ I am making concessions now.”

“ By listening to me politely ? Yes, you regard all the smaller conventionalities.”

"I do. I have no pretence to transcend humanity. My contempt for the individual includes my individual self. I try to regard all the smaller conventionalities, and to some of them I am really attached. I get vexed at trifles. I am particular about some quite unimportant things. For that reason I prefer the conventional dinner to the Sunday supper, which is one of my concessions to you; to which you sit down, perspiring and religious, in a hat. And I despise myself for ever thinking about such light things, when I realize the greatness of the work before me. Do I love you? My dear Hilda, I do not even love myself. My point of view has been changed by——"

"Don't talk," she broke in passionately, bursting into tears, "don't go on talking! It doesn't comfort me. Love me again, Gabriel! Love me! Else I shall hate you."

"Excessive emotion," said the doctor, "is not good for you, and will probably hasten your day. You must go to bed at once."

She rose like a whipped child. "I'm sorry,"

she said, in a low husky voice ; “I forgot, I know you don’t like scenes, and I’m wanting to try very hard to please you in everything. I’m going ; good night, dear.”

The doctor raised one of her hands and kissed it, and opened the door for her. She passed out. Halfway up the broad staircase that led to her room she paused a moment, thinking. What had he meant by “hasten her day” ? He had said once before that “her day would come.” She knew instinctively that it would be useless to ask him, and put the question by with a kind of despair. In her room she stood before the glass, surveying herself. The colour on her cheeks was slightly disordered. She took a sponge and washed it all off. She made up her mind not to use it again. It was of no good for her to try and make herself look pretty any more ; and, even if rouge had given her beauty, that would not have made her husband love her again. “Love !” she whispered to herself, panting. Then she remembered that it was wicked to use rouge. She had but

just come from church, and had painted her face like a bad woman : it was wicked of her. She knelt and prayed God to forgive her. Then she rose, and took a candle and stepped across the passage to another room. It had been her baby's nursery. She unlocked the door and entered.

The room was neatly kept. A little cradle stood in one corner, bedecked and empty. She walked over to it, and rocked it a little. Then she opened a drawer, and turned over piles of tiny clothes that were not wanted now. "My little baby!" she whispered. Her eyes were strained, and aching, and dry. But she cried again in bed that night.

It was long before Dr. Lamb came to bed. He had not been working in his laboratory; he had been thinking about Claudius Sandell. The doctor had not had much opportunity to observe him; but, nevertheless, he summed him up: a man whose pride was greater than his instinct of self-preservation, a truthful man.

The doctor thought for a long time. "Oh,

I shall use him—I shall certainly use him,” he said to himself at last. “A great find; he will quite repay me.”

Upstairs Claudius Sandell slept peacefully.

CHAPTER IV.

“YES,” said Harry Burnage to himself, “I must marry Angela.” He paced up and down the soft carpet, thinking about it. He was alone in his well-ordered chambers, smoking a cigarette that was not to be bought in shops. It was a good cigarette, but its flavour was as nothing to the fact that it was not to be bought in shops. It seemed to fill the room with that atmosphere of uniqueness, distinction, speciality, that Henry Burnage believed that he loved. He had arrived slowly at his resolution; he rarely hurried important things; he liked to act correctly; and, though he would say a passably brilliant thing about the commercial spirit and the middle classes, he very much liked to get on in the world. He had been considering

marriage with Angela Wycherley as one might consider anonymous journalism—in a critical spirit, weighing the arguments for and against. That was the way he had begun at least.

Angela's mother was barely possible. She was too large, too obvious, too good-tempered, and she gave too much publicity to that side of her which should have been reserved for the specialist in dyspepsia. Her circle included too generously. Well, once married, Henry Burnage felt that Mrs. Wycherley could be deleted altogether. Then there was her father—a mildly commercial person, whose Sunday night anxiety (unless he had one of those headaches) seemed to be first to find the background, and then to sit in it. He would not need to be deleted, he would delete himself. He would probably do something for Angela. The commerce was only mildly successful, but Angela was the only unmarried child; it was almost certain there would be something for her. Besides, Henry Burnage's own father had made him a very liberal offer

—if he got married. The elder Burnage did not believe that young men kept straight unless they married—besides, he wanted to see a grandchild.

Then there was Angela to be considered. Just here the merely critical consideration became touched by emotion—the material side of Henry Burnage was in love with Angela, he had come under her charm. Now, this charm was not peculiar to Angela; many other girls have it, and it is more easily described in its result. Angela made the men that she met imagine her secrets; she inspired fascinating reverie. Burnage, with all his business qualities, was much given to fascinating reverie.

A catalogue's justice would have been unjust to her looks, for her features were slightly irregular. The ebb and flow of colour on her dusky cheeks, or a chance movement of her long eyelashes, or the curve of her figure in some chance position that she had taken would baulk dispassionate criticism; she had a store of trifles to throw into the

scale against classical beauty, and apparently outweigh it. She had seemed at one time to Burnage to be a flirt; but now he was inclined to think that she had grown serious-hearted, and was being hurt by it. He wondered if she cried sometimes at night, just before she went to sleep, because of her thoughts. That would be terrible. She should tell him about it—just give him her warm little hands to hold, cast her eyes down, and make shy confidences. His vanity, caught by his imagination, soared grandly upwards, like thistledown riding the wind. He began to picture things; her rapt eyes seemed to look at him, and her low voice to tell him how good he was. He seemed to hear music; the wedding march took its memorable downward sweep, curled over the key-note, and broke at his feet. It moved upwards again, changed to a slow, straining waltz that beat its great wings regularly—upwards into the rarefied atmosphere of the passionate lover, where the whole world stopped, and one kiss continued.

He had arrived slowly at his resolution—beginning with criticism and ending in ecstasy, just at the last, warming a cold ambition by the fires of love, or the nearest that he could get to love. He was glad that the resolution was taken; it had been hovering in his mind for some time. He felt a kind of importance in consequence of it; he seemed to himself to be embarking on a fresh epoch in his existence.

He dined at his club, and dined well. Thoughts of a love-touched future, black coffee, a small glass of kirsch, and another of the cigarettes that could only be obtained by favour occupied him for the next two minutes. Then he proceeded to write two letters.

His first letter was to his father, and Henry Burnage's letters to his father were exceedingly unlike his letters to anybody else. The elder Burnage had started life with a small shop, and although he had long ago retired from his business he had never been able to feel properly ashamed of it; and he never said even a passably brilliant thing about the

commercial spirit and the middle classes. This alone made him different from the kind of man that his son was. The father was somewhat Puritanical, and quite uncultured; here again the son was different. In a more humorous moment the father would sometimes say: "Have you been buying any æsthetic things lately, Henry?" What was to be done with such a man—a man who could never succeed in forgetting the back numbers of *Punch*—a man who was quite crude and point-blank—a man who could never be convinced that he misunderstood another man's point of view, and yet always did misunderstand it? Henry could only sigh drearily, and try to read the essays of Matthew Arnold without noticing that their severest thrusts went straight through his own father—happily ignorant of the assault, and quite contented. Just as a mean motive and a more generous motive had made Henry decide to marry Angela, a mixture of motives influenced him in the treatment of his father. He was not without filial affection, but he

also wondered, occasionally, in what proportion his father would, in his last will and testament, divide his property between him and his very plain and unattractive sister. He tried to write to his father the kind of letter that his father would like, but he spent as little time as possible on the composition of it, knowing that his father was not critical in such things. To-night his letter ran as follows :—

“ MY DEAR FATHER,

“ You may be assured that your last letter—stating that you have had no return of the sciatica—gave me great pleasure. I was delighted to hear that you managed to get as far as from our house to the cemetery. You must be careful not to overdo it, but I suppose you would not walk that distance without permission from the doctor. Certainly the embrocation which he prescribed seems to have done wonders. So you have got the main drainage at last, and are compelled to connect with it ; I always said that it would

come, and after the initial expenses you will probably find the arrangement much more satisfactory. I am sorry that the new vicar is not to your liking ; his adoption of the eastward position and other ritualistic practices in face of so many protests seems to me very silly. It is, as you say, a great pity that the living should be in the gift of Sir Constantine Sandell—a man who has belonged at times to almost every conceivable religious sect. By the way, I am almost certain that I saw Claudius Sandell in the Fulham Road about a month ago, just after I sent you my last letter. It was getting dark, and I cannot be positive ; but, if I am right, he has very much come down in the world. The man I saw was dressed in the seediest clothes, no stick or gloves, smoking a clay-pipe, and peering into the window of a small eating-house. As I had two other men with me, I was naturally not anxious to claim the acquaintance of—apparently—a half-starved tramp ; so I hurried on to avoid recognition. Otherwise I should have been glad to have lent him

a few shillings for the sake of old times together at Cambridge. Of course, we do not know what the quarrel was between Sir Constantine and Claudius. You think that Sir Constantine was in the wrong ; he may have been. At the same time I do not think that a father—however hot-tempered, and however eccentric—entirely breaks with his only son for nothing. Why was it that Claudius, who was quite by way of being my friend at Trinity, never told me one word of the reason for the quarrel, and parried my questions on the subject ? Why is it that, although he has been in London, and knew that he could get my address at the Temple, he has never been to see me, and has never sent me his own address ? It must mean that he is ashamed of something. It is strange that he—who was always thought so wonderful—should have been compelled to leave Cambridge without taking a degree, and should then have gone completely under ; while I—who was nobody in particular—took a second in my tripos, and am already

beginning to get on at the bar. By the way, is that curious woman, Miss Comby, still at Sir Constantine's?

"In conclusion, I have something important to say. I feel that you are right, and I accept your very generous offer. You will not be surprised to hear that the lady whom I intend to marry is Angela Wycherley, of whom I have often spoken to you. I am now only waiting my opportunity to make a formal proposal; and I think I may say, without conceit, that I know what her answer will be. Before I do so, I shall be glad to hear from you if you think the alliance suitable.

"Your affectionate son,

"HENRY BURNAGE."

His next letter was to Luke Monsett. And to him Henry Burnage employed a sort of sham literary style, with a good deal of affectation, short paragraphs, and capital letters in it.

"DEAR LUKE,

"Action and reaction make me distrust all. The swing of the pendulum in

one direction seems to take a man so far: it also returns as far. There is no Stability. How we cling to the expression of culture through furniture—environment. Nay, I still cling to it. Yet always I shift my ground from time to time. Even now it is better to employ aniline dyes with a duchess than to like the art flower-pot that has penetrated Bloomsbury.

“Stability !

“If you knew—if you could only know—how I long to get to it !

“Now comes some hope at last. You ask what? A woman’s eyes, that are more beautiful because they are now grown serious; on my part, nights in which I do not sleep, but think entrancingly. Is there not hope of Stability there? The bourgeois marry to perpetuate their very indifferent species; and I to find anchorage for my soul in calm waters. If so—then, at last, Stability. Of other news, nothing—save that I hear that our friend, Claudius Sandell, is now definitely gone under. And you thought him very

great. Ah, well, it will teach you to distrust !

“ Of your own life, what ?

“ Write soon.

“ Yours in these bonds of flesh,

“ HENRY BURNAGE.”

He did not write in this style to his father, because his father was not sympathetic, would not have understood, and would certainly have called him an ass. But Henry Burnage fancied the style, and probably would have believed that his letter to Luke was rather good.

But in one point he was mistaken : Claudius was not yet definitely “ gone under.”

In fact, not very long after this date, Dr. Gabriel Lamb wrote a letter to his bankers, asking them to place eight thousand pounds to the credit of Mr. Claudius Sandell (of whose signature he enclosed examples) during a period of eight consecutive days, to commence on the following Saturday morning. The circumstances which led to this order may now be recorded.

CHAPTER V.

THREE days after the curious arrival of Claudius Sandell at the house of Dr. Gabriel Lamb, the two men stood together in the garden, one morning after breakfast. Claudius was smoking a delicious cigar, the first that he had smoked for over a year. He had drunk good coffee; his memory contrasted it with the "cup o' thick" that he had been compelled to take a few days before at an early-morning stall. He remembered the sharp eyes of the man who had handed it him, and the furtive Jew boy that had rubbed shoulders with him, and the bad green smell of everything.

And now he was looking out on a well-kept garden, noting the fruit trees as they spread themselves to the sun along the wall. He

heard the sleepy hum of the mowing-machine, where at a little distance a gardener was busy on the lawn. He had been refreshed by a long sleep and a cold bath ; he was wearing good clothes ; he had fed well and been well treated. It was hard for him to realize that all this was the result of charity, for the kindness that had been shown him had come in the guise of hospitality. Dr. Lamb had acted up to his principle, that it was impossible for a gentleman to take advantage of the necessities of another gentleman in order to humiliate him.

“Come down to the end of the garden,” said the doctor, cheerily. “You haven’t half seen the place yet.”

The doctor was wearing a short holland jacket and no hat ; in one hand he swung a small empty canvas bag. As they went down the paths Claudius happened to make some remarks, with almost boyish *naïveté*, on the perfection of the house and garden. He had, he said, never seen a place which was so complete in small details—trifles.

“Now, my dear Sandell,” said the doctor, putting one hand on his arm, “I am not going to contradict you, but I am going to correct an impression that I believe you must have formed of me. I own that I have taken great care lest there should be anything wrong in even the minutest domestic matters, but you must not think, that because I am particular about trifles, I admire them or take an interest in them. I assure you that I hate them; I hate them so much that I cannot bear to have them in my mind. If the details of my house and domestic life were wrong, they would always be obtruding themselves upon my attention: I should think about them, and I should detest that. It is the same with money. If a man really hates money he takes good care that he has enough of it for all his needs, in order that he may not think about it.”

“You found me,” said Claudius, “without a penny in my pocket and fainting from exhaustion. But, all the same, I assure you that I do not love money.”

“Do not,” said the doctor, pleadingly, “be

so ultra-sensitive, my dear fellow. I like fine feelings, but to be ultra-sensitive is so—so altogether damnable. I assure you that your case was not in my mind when I spoke. And my remark would not apply to you in any case, because you are too young. You will make money yet, because you hate it; there is plenty of time before you.”

“You’re much too good to me, doctor,” Claudius said rather seriously. “I am inclined to agree with you : one of the greatest curses of poverty and privation is that they make a man who is not used to them sensitive and bad-tempered. I never used to be bad-tempered.”

“There’s good enough evidence of that.”

Claudius looked as if he did not quite understand, and the doctor went on—

“I mean, of course, in your physiognomy. You are, on the whole, very good-tempered; you can lose your temper badly, for all that. In that you are not exceptional at all. But it is queer that you have never told a lie, and couldn’t tell one if you wanted to.”

“Why,” said Claudius, “I’ve told any amount of the usual——”

“Quite so—the ordinary social fib, that has no other motive but to spare somebody’s feelings. We may leave that out; that is not dishonourable. You have never told the dishonourable lie—the lie that would get you out of some scrape or be of some advantage to you.”

“But, of course,” Claudius answered, “one doesn’t do that.”

“No? I’ve told dozens of dishonourable lies myself. But there, my system of ethics is different and simpler: there is one great purpose, and all else is subordinate to it. But men, in other respects, like yourself, do, as a matter of fact, tell mean lies, or would, if the occasion were urgent enough. Now, no occasion, however urgent, would make you break your word.”

“Well, one never knows.”

Claudius found this open praise, as it seemed, of himself very embarrassing; and he hastened to change the subject.

“If it comes to that, doctor, I have noticed one exceptional point in you.”

“I had flattered myself,” the doctor said, “that I was composed chiefly of exceptional points. Which do you mean?”

“You talk a great deal of your work, and profess to be devoted to your work, and call it the enthusiasm of your life; and yet you really *do* work very hard. I’ve only been here a few days, but I’ve noticed that. I happened to wake at three o’clock this morning, and looked out. There was still a light in your laboratory. Now, at Cambridge it was different: the men who talked much about their work, as a rule, did least; and to keep an average of your number of hours’ work per diem was simply a preliminary step to being spun in your tripos.”

“Well, the case is so different. The ordinary man at Cambridge works, I suppose, for the purpose of his tripos, and with the involved purposes of pleasing his people and providing himself with a profession. Oh yes those are very good things, of course—but

they are not great. If you try to simulate an enthusiasm for work with such purposes, you are likely to use up all the energy for the simulation, and have none left for the work. Yes; I did work late last night." The doctor's eyes grew brighter, and his manner more excited; he gesticulated a little with the hand that held the canvas bag. "Last night, Sandell, I stood before the gate—the locked gate that stands between the living and the mystery of life. I tampered with the lock, but I could not force it. I could not get in. But, Sandell, I assure you—I am speaking seriously—last night I caught a glimpse between the bars. It makes me breathless. Can you wonder that I am enthusiastic and—Lord! I do keep talking about myself. I wish I did not. I shall become a bore."

"Will you?" said Claudius. "If I may speak as frankly of you to you as you have done of me to me, I will say that I have never met any one who interested me so much, and I do not suppose that I shall

ever meet any one who will be half so kind to me."

"Oh, kindness is not in the question at all. For all that I give you, I intend to receive as much again. Practically, you are in a hotel, and have the means to pay your bill, only it does not quite suit either of us to treat each other just like that. No, not a word. I won't be thanked—I assure you that I shall come out of this under a great obligation to you. Now, look here, we won't talk of this ; I want to show you my rabbits."

They had reached the end of the garden. Here there was a row of twelve small rabbit-hutches, standing about two feet from the ground. The hutches were kept very clean and dry, and it was evident that good care was taken of their occupants.

"I didn't know you were a fancier," said Claudius.

"Oh, I'm not ; these are all of the common kind. They hardly remain here long enough for me to make pets of them, and in a pet one would prefer a little more intelligence. Still,

these hutches are well planned, I think, and I like to have them properly fed and cared for until they are wanted. Research, you know, would be impossible without experiment ; one is as humane, of course, as it is possible to be under the circumstances. By the way, I want one of these this morning for my work."

He opened one of the hutches, and a black doe that had been nibbling green stuff at the entrance scurried away to the far end of the cage ; pressed close to the boards she watched the two men with soft, furtive, frightened eyes.

"Pretty creature, isn't it?" said the doctor.

"Now then, my common rabbit, you're wanted. Why didn't you stand erect, and have articulate speech, and wear white ties in the evening? Then you would have had a God and lost Him, and worried yourself about it at nights, when you had no one to talk to, and never got any further ; and also you would have bragged about it—people always do. You weren't consulted, neither was I. Now you are going to die in a dream, but first

you have got to tell me what you know, but don't know that you know." He stretched his great hand into the hutch, and grasped the doe by the neck. "Come, now," he said, pleasantly, as she kicked and struggled, "don't you be frightened, my little dear." Then he dropped her into the canvas bag.

The two men walked on to the garden entrance of the laboratory. Vivisection had been the subject of debates at which Claudius had been present; they had not been, as a rule, very well-informed debates: it had been a case of brutality against sentimentality, and had not interested him very much. One of the most potent arguments for vivisection that he had yet come across was that Dr. Gabriel Lamb practised it. He mentioned this to the doctor. Dr. Lamb put down his canvas bag in the garden path, and fumbled for the key of the laboratory door. He was an astonishing grotesque figure; the short holland jacket did not seem to go well with the bald head, with its fringe of auburn hair. Curious traces of scientist, sensualist, and poet, seemed to flit

across his face, hopelessly inconsistent and passing in a moment. Between the box-edging on either side of the path the black doe-rabbit jumped and struggled in the bag that imprisoned it.

“Vivisection? I am not, of course, opposed to it; at the same time I realize its limitations. It has taught us what we know of physiology, and it will teach us more; but it will never teach us everything, as practised at present, and nothing less than everything is of much good to myself. I have got to pass through that gate of which I spoke to you. See here,—you know, of course, that a pig is internally much the same as a man. But the pig’s nervous constitution—a very important factor, mark you—is as different from a man’s——” Once more he broke off abruptly. “You are provoking me to become a scientific bore,” he went on; “and all bores are hateful; and the scientific bore is the worst of the lot.”

“Well, doctor,” said Claudius, “I can only say again that I am not bored. Now, by the way, I could not, perhaps, do a good hard day’s

work. But I am so far recovered that a few hours' secretarial work would not hurt me. May I not undertake your correspondence for you, or copy your scientific memoranda? You have already decided that I am to be trusted—that I should not abuse your confidence—and I need not tell you that I should be careful. I should give you the best of such ability as I have.”

“That is quite so,” said the doctor. “If I were the usual philanthropist, I should probably fake up some secretarial work for you to do. But I am not; and the work for which I want your assistance is far more serious and important. I will tell you about it when the time comes. In the meantime, if you would order the victoria and take my wife for a drive, I know she would be delighted. No; you’d rather drive yourself, I think. Have the dog-cart and the bay mare. Oh yes—and you’d better ask for her, or they will give you ‘Peach-blossom,’ who’s a good horse, but not so amusing.”

Claudius drove the bay mare, and she did

not give him much leisure for conversation. She was a beauty, but she needed driving. Mrs. Lamb watched him earnestly all the way, and only spoke to praise him. The doctor never drove the mare himself. It is curious that even the cleverest man will fail to notice when things are significant, if they concern himself. Claudius had that morning omitted to notice several things.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was a comfortable house to live in, Claudius decided, but there were some queer points about it. In the first place, there were no visitors: it suited the doctor, apparently, to live in a certain style—dinner, for instance, was distinctly a formal function—but he evidently did not think there was any necessity for witnesses of his severe taste in appointments, or of his conversation, which at times was brilliant, or of the excellence of his *chef* and his cellar. In a word, he did, merely to suit himself, what most people do in order to keep up appearances. No stranger apparently, with the exception of Claudius, ever trod those soft carpets, or tasted those exquisite wines, or heard the doctor on those few occasions when it pleased

him to put his great ideas aside and be merely eccentrically witty. Mrs. Lamb must have realized that Claudius would notice this. She took particular pains to tell him that the doctor was a recluse and would see no one—and so on.

There was something queer, too, about Mrs. Lamb. She was religious—ardently religious, but yet she was an untamable woman. Religion might inspire her, Claudius thought—and he was angry with himself for such analysis of his hostess,—but it would never hold her. Her eyes looked searchingly at him out of her pale face, and he saw in them this much, at least, that she was not a woman to be taken lightly and easily. With regard to her feelings towards her husband, he was very much in doubt; but he was certain that she was afraid of him.

And what was the doctor's own position? He was formally courteous to his wife in public; further, he did not talk her over with Claudius; further, he took an evident interest in her. But, for all that, Claudius

could not persuade himself that the interest which the doctor took in his wife was the same as the interest which a man takes in the woman whom he loves ; it seemed a colder, more scientific, thing. Claudius could not explain it : he could only wonder.

But one point seemed stranger to him than all—the curious way in which he was taken for granted. He had been in the house for days, and he had come into it as a broken-down tramp ; the Lambs had only his word for it that he was not a broken-down tramp : yet the days went by, and no question was put to him about his past, and very little was said about his payment of his obligation—nothing, in fact, except the doctor's indefinite assurance that it would be all right. As a rule he spent the greater part of the day with Mrs. Lamb : he drove her out, read to her, educated her taste in music. She began to make some sort of confidences to him ; she told him that she had had a very great sorrow, and that religion had been a consolation to her in it. Once she began to

talk about the doctor—with her eyes fixed nervously on the door of the room, lest he should enter suddenly. Claudius did not like this. Gabriel was very clever, she said, but it was too awful—he despised religion. He seemed to be entirely given up to one thing. She did not know whither it was leading, but she had an uncomfortable sensation that it *was* leading somewhere—that they were on the verge of things. Then she hesitated, and looked shyly down at her own knees, and said, with seeming irrelevance :—

“I want you, Mr. Sandell, to be very careful.”

“In what way? In my dealings with the doctor? Why surely——” He broke off and laughed. “You must not have these pre-sentiments; there is nothing to be afraid of in a scientific enthusiasm.”

“Isn’t there?” she said, rather drearily.

Claudius had no desire whatever to make confidences—if anything he was inclined to reserve; but he felt that his host and hostess had a claim to know something about him,

and it was characteristic of him that he had to satisfy all claims of which he was conscious, whether they were pressed or not. He chose his opportunity one night after dinner. The dining-room was large and irregular in shape. The table—an oval oak table—was laid in a square recess, and brightly lighted with wax candles; the rest of the room was almost in shadow. It had been rather an interesting dinner. The doctor, starting from a case in the papers that morning, had gone on to a theory that suicide was largely the result of a sense of humour. People killed themselves because they saw that any further existence would be ridiculous. It was a pity—but those who had a sense of humour generally had it over-accentuated. Had Claudius ever noticed that? And had it never occurred to him how much better things must be on the moon? Yes, of course, there were the usual shilling-manual baby's arguments to show that the atmosphere and temperature of the moon did not permit the existence of human beings. It was the common confusion of beings with

bodies. There were certainly beings on the moon, and the bodies did not matter. Things would be much better there, because nothing there would be over-accentuated. The consuming passion of love that we men and women feel would be on the moon a mild preference. Our Athanasian Creed would be there a hesitating assent to Matthew Arnold's definition. Dinner would be afternoon tea, and afternoon tea would be no more than one transient, dreamy glance at the thinnest possible bread-and-butter. Everything would be toned down.

"My own enthusiasm," he concluded, "would be nothing more than the feeling which makes a boy buy the sixpenny chemical cabinet, do four tricks, break one test tube, and swop the remainder for a specimen of common quartz with which to initiate a new geological passion."

Claudius took up the idea, and went on with it mirthfully. He and the doctor combined their suggestions—the wildest suggestions—of what this under-accentuated, toned-

down moon-life would be like. Mrs. Lamb, consciously well dressed, watched them in silence, sometimes with anxious eyes, as she wondered if all this was quite religious, sometimes with quite a different expression as she thought what a good thing it was to look at Claudius and hear his musical voice, and then grew afraid of the thought. The doctor said that the moon-life would be heavenly.

“Why not have it? Why not reconstruct your existence here? Why not reduce your enthusiasm to the school-boy’s whim?”

The doctor became suddenly serious. “That is my own fault for speaking inaccurately,” he said. “I spoke of my own enthusiasm, and I was wrong. The enthusiasm is not mine, but I am its. I belong to it; I am its slave. Body and soul I am claimed by the service of humanity, and given up to it.”

“But a willing slave?”

The doctor did not answer for a moment. He went on peeling a peach, his white nervous fingers and the knife in them suggesting the

rapid neatness of a surgical operation. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I really do not know," he said at last. "I never wanted it to come, and I never resist it. It is, I should say, that some powerful tendency has absorbed my will into it. I feel like part of a natural law. Yes, that's absurd, but I really grope for words to describe my sensations, and I do not get them very well."

"And your work is for the good of humanity?"

"Ultimately."

"I wish I had some part in it. My end in view in my own work was so much more selfish. Perhaps that was why I failed. I have never told you about it."

Dr. Lamb shot a rapid glance at his wife, and it was she who answered.

"Yes? You must not speak about it, Mr. Sandell, if the subject hurts you."

"On the contrary," he protested, "I am anxious to tell you. The one thing I can do, apparently, is to prevent you from being generous in the dark."

“No, no !” said Mrs. Lamb, leaning back in her chair. “You must not imply that we could possibly mistrust you. That is hard on us.” She spoke earnestly.

The doctor looked at her significantly. She was saying just what he wished, but he was very well aware that she was not saying it because he wished it, nor from mere politeness, but because she really meant it. It confirmed a vague notion that had crossed his mind that day. It enabled him, as he thought over his future plans, to see where there was a possible weak spot. The whole thought went through his mind in a flash.

“Quite so,” he murmured, as he passed the tips of his fingers gently through the rose-water in the bowl beside him. “Quite so.”

“I should really like to tell you,” said Claudius. “I think it would interest you.”

Mrs. Lamb leant her elbows on the table, and her head on her hands, and looked at him intently.

“Ah ! That is undoubted ; it would be very good of you,” said the doctor.

At this moment a servant came forward with the coffee, and Dr. Lamb gave a rapid order.

"The coffee and—and everything we are likely to want—on the lawn. At once."

"You would rather?" the doctor went on inquiringly, turning to the others. "The night is so hot, and I thought it would be pleasanter to talk out there."

They both thought it a capital idea. Mrs. Lamb's maid had entered the room, with an Oriental shawl in her hands. Mrs. Lamb adjusted it carefully over her head and shoulders. She was a curiously grotesque figure in that shawl. Her dinner-dress had all that Madame Ellice could do for mortal woman. The pallor of her face and the darkness of her hair were noticeable. She missed being beautiful. She looked like an Egyptian dissenter that had known Bond Street. The world had chosen her dress; the flesh and the spirit showed alternately in the expression of her face.

Outside it was growing dusk. A big rug

had been spread over the grass; on it were lounge chairs and a low table. On the table were the smoking apparatus and the wonderful Madeira that the doctor liked to taste after dinner. The tiny Roman lamp gave a minute weird flame. The servant handed the coffee, and withdrew. The two men lighted their cigars from the lamp.

“Now,” said the doctor, “if you are ready, Mr. Sandell.”

Claudius began. “I think,” he said slowly, “that the thing I have wanted most all through life has been freedom—the absence of limitation. I have often thought that I would be willing merely to taste it and then die. Yet I have never tasted it. As for my birth, I am the only son of my father, and my recollection of my mother—who died when I was a child—is very vague. My father, Sir Constantine Sandell—his knighthood was one of the birthday honours in the year that I was born, and it is an honour that he has since regretted—would have been considered, in some respects, an indulgent man. At

Eton—I know now—I had very much more pocket-money than was good for me. At the age of sixteen I got the parental sanction to the use of tobacco—well, my father is himself a smoker. At Cambridge, again, my allowance was very generous. But in important points I was never free. Now, religion is, I suppose, an important point.”

Mrs. Lamb looked up at the grey sky, and then slowly down again. Claudius continued—

“Religion was, is, and always will be, a most important point to my father. Unfortunately, it is a point on which he has never been able to satisfy himself. He has changed his religion times without number. He is about due into Buddhism by now,” he said with a bitter laugh, “for I do not see what else is left. No, I am not joking. And I was always compelled to follow any sect with which he happened to be in sympathy. I myself have been a Scotch Presbyterian, an English Low Churchman, and an English Ritualist ; I have found that the truth was in the Greek Church alone ; I have been a Roman Catholic ; I have

followed my father into the religion of ‘three persons and no God,’ which has its dwelling somewhere off Fetter Lane ; I have tried with him to find consolation in metaphysics that neither of us could quite understand ; then I listened to the sermons of Parker, and after that to Voysey. I did not mind, I was only a boy ; fellows always believed what their fathers believed ; it was all in the day’s work. It was at the call to spiritualism that I rebelled ; by this time I was at Cambridge, and had begun to think. Now, my father had invited to our place a professed medium from London—a Miss Matilda Comby.”

At this moment the doctor and Mrs. Lamb exchanged glances, as though the name of Miss Matilda Comby were significant. It was almost dark. Claudius noticed nothing, and continued—

“For all I know to the contrary, Miss Matilda Comby may be there still. With all that I have against her, I must own that she is a distinctly clever woman. I began to study conjuring tricks ; I paid — with my father’s

money—for lessons from professors. When I thought that the time was ripe, I exposed Miss Matilda Comby, and showed to my father that the absolute proof—as he called it—was ingenious, but that they did better at the Egyptian Hall. I might as well have spoken to the Pyramids. Miss Matilda Comby was clever and plausible ; she had warned my father against the very explanations that I offered. He considered that her position was confirmed, and told me, in so many words, that I was a blasphemer.”

“And that was the cause of your quarrel with your father ?” said Dr. Lamb, dreamily.

“No, he still had hopes of me. We did quarrel, of course, but the real reason is much more difficult to tell. One day, at Cambridge, I had a letter from him that surprised me and distressed me a good deal. I knew that this woman, Matilda Comby, had a great influence over my father, but I did not guess how great—until I read that letter. Briefly, it peremptorily ordered me to marry Matilda Comby—a woman ten years older than myself—a

woman whom I had always had the greatest difficulty to treat with even the barest civility—a woman whom I knew to be a fraudulent charlatan. During the whole of a year I had been doing my best to get this woman turned out of our house—and now I was calmly told that I was to marry her. The spirits had willed it; the spirits were very anxious for it; the spirits had foretold that it would be ‘a singularly blessed union.’ It sounds like madness; yet in all business matters my father, at this very time, was showing himself particularly sane, particularly judicious.”

“That,” said the doctor, “is not uncommon.”

“Matilda Comby also must have had some talent for speculative business. My father is, I suppose, a very wealthy man. With all her influence she doubted at first if she could persuade him to leave his entire property away from me. On money matters he was too sane. But it *had* probably occurred to her that she might marry me, and come into the money that way. The spirits had suggested the

marriage, but there was never any doubt that the spirits were merely Matilda Comby."

"One moment," said Mrs. Lamb, rather shyly. "Matilda—I mean Miss Comby—was a charlatan, of course. I think myself that spiritualism is wicked. But has it not occurred to you that possibly she was really—it is so hard to be certain—really in love with you?"

"Impossible, Mrs. Lamb. I had always made it fairly clear that I despised her."

"Sometimes, you know, that does not make any difference."

"Well, I do not think that her subsequent behaviour showed that she was very fond of me. At first I treated the thing as a joke; but I soon saw that my father was in earnest: then I refused point-blank. Now, my father does not take point-blank refusals nicely as a rule, and I expected a storm. On the contrary, I got a very patient letter. The spirits had been at it again. They had told him that I was secretly engaged to another woman, and that it was for this reason I had refused, but that it would be to the advantage and happiness of

the other woman if I gave her up. I replied that there was no other woman in the case at all—as a matter of fact, although it is not a particularly interesting fact, I have never been in love in my life—and I repeated my refusal. His next letter accused me of having trifled with Matilda Comby's affections. Oh, it was the wildest business! Matilda Comby never appeared directly in it at all. But it was obvious that her hand guided my father's in every letter that he wrote. I need not give you details of all the correspondence. At last he called me a liar, and I sent him a letter, which I now regret—for, after all, I am his son. That finished it. I had a brief communication from him to the effect that he did not wish to see me or hear from me again. He enclosed me a cheque for one quarter's allowance in advance, and told me that I was to expect nothing further from him, either during his lifetime or after his death. I sent the cheque back. Well, there I was with a bank balance of fifty pounds and the world before me."

"It was very cruel of him," said Mrs. Lamb.

“It was very cruel and unjust.” She shivered slightly.

“Ah,” the doctor said, “it has turned a little chilly, hasn’t it? Let us finish the story indoors—in my study, Sandell. I have got some of that tobacco about which you were speaking, if you care to try it.”

“Thanks very much,” said Sandell. “I should be delighted to try the tobacco, but I must get my pipe first from upstairs.”

As soon as he had gone upstairs, Doctor Lamb turned brusquely to his wife.

“Matilda Comby?” he said. “Your sister?”

“I—I fear so.”

“Why is she going by her maiden name? Oh, I see—yes, her husband.”

“I thought she would go back to it after her husband—went away, but I know no more for certain than you do. She had stopped writing letters to us, you know, Gabriel, even before my marriage. It is possible that her husband may have died in—died there.”

“ Ah, yes. My wife’s sister originally ran away with a fraudulent company promoter; he married her, and got into difficulties; he is now, if alive, doing a term of penal servitude; so your sister resumes her maiden name, becomes a common swindler, and attempts bigamy. What trifles these things are! They ought not to concern me. And yet, Hilda, I should prefer that you did not mention these facts to Mr. Sandell.”

“ But they give him the means of reconciliation with his father.”

“ He will never take the first step in that direction. Besides, why sacrifice any man’s good opinion of you? How will you be regarded if you say that you are the sister of Matilda Comby? With involuntary dislike and distrust.”

“ But I might write to Sir Charles—anonymously—giving proof of my statements.”

“ Quite so! Admirable! But you must get proof. Unless you know that the convict is still alive, you have no case. Find that out first. How? I have not the least idea.

Be clear on your facts, before you sacrifice sisterly affection to your passion for——” he paused a moment, and added, “your passion for justice and reconciliation.”

“I will do that, Gabriel. I won’t say anything to Mr. Sandell. How happy he will be to get back in his right place again !”

“There, run along, Hilda. He will be down in the study by now. Join him, and say I will be there in a moment. I have a short note to write, which must go to-night.”

When she had gone, he sat down before the fire, with his head in his hands, thrusting fingers into the fringe of hair. His brow wrinkled, and then cleared ; he smiled horribly to himself.

“Hilda’s letter cannot go for three or four days. I *think* that I can finish my business with Claudius Sandell to-night, to-morrow at latest. After I have got him—once got him—bound him by his word—after that, there may be as much reconciliation as you please, my dear Hilda, because it will not make any difference. Praise God !” He rose and

paced the room excitedly. "Praise God in the highest!" he said with fervour.

He sat down and scribbled a brief note, and gave it to a servant. Then he crossed the hall, and went down the passage to the study. "I wonder," he thought to himself, "does Hilda think that I notice nothing—nothing at all? She is falling in love with Sandell—I use it. He is entirely honourable—I use it. I have been kind to him—and I use that, and now,—we really progress."

CHAPTER VII.

THE rest of the story Claudius had to tell need not be told in his own words. He had come to London with his fifty pounds in his pocket, and had taken cheap lodgings in Bloomsbury. He meant to live economically, but he did not quite know how to do it; he also meant to write, and he did not quite know how to do that either. It was probably his acquaintance with Burnage and Monsett at Cambridge that had given him this idea of making a living by literature. These two men had been actually printed in a London paper—Burnage once, and Monsett twice. In all three cases it was poetry, and unremunerated. Claudius did not think that he could write poetry; he cheerfully acknowledged in Burnage and Monsett their superior

talents. But, in common with most men, he wanted to tell a story—and, unlike most men, he had a story to tell. He had had it for a long time. He remembered vaguely what had started it. He had been one summer evening on a country railway-station ; and as he waited for the train, he had read the advertisements, and some chance line of the merest foolishness had been whimsical enough to give him a suggestion. Looking up, he saw at the further end of the platform a woman standing silhouetted against the sunset sky, and the sight of her had carried the suggestion on. It had all been forgotten next day, and all remembered many days afterwards. Since that time it had gone through a long period of change and growth in his own mind, until he knew all the people of his story intimately, and its incidents had become like incidents in his own career. Now, when he had to make his own livelihood, he thought he would write his own novel. Both Burnage and Monsett had drawn for themselves brilliant pictures of literary success,

and Claudius had listened. He knew that such success was not for him; he merely hoped to write a passable, readable, and consequently salable story. There was nothing else that he cared to do.

While he was learning how to write—he was surprised to find there was so very much to learn—and learning how to live economically, the fifty pounds slipped away. There came a day when he left his Bloomsbury lodgings and took all his personal belongings to a shop in the Fulham Road. Nominally and externally it was a second-hand furniture shop, but there was really nothing that its proprietor would not buy and sell. He was an obese man, with a little voice, and a quick, narrow eye, and a watch-chain like a golden snake that suns itself on a hillock. To this man Claudius sold all his books and almost all his clothes, leaving himself hardly enough to keep himself warm—it was late winter.

“Now, sir,” said the man, when the last iniquitous bargain had been completed, “is there nothing else? I buy anything and

sell anything. Think now, sir. Any little bits of furniture? Old carpets or rugs? Fetch 'em away in my own cart and give you no trouble. Or bedding now—I give a fair price for that.”

Claudius being in rather a mad and bitter mood, had answered that he would sell himself, body and soul, for one thousand pounds and one year to spend it in.

“Come now, sir,” the man went on, “joking apart——”

“I’m not joking; I’ve nothing else to sell, and I mean what I say.”

“Supposing,” the man said, rubbing his fat chin, “the law allowed it and I could tie you up somehow: I might risk two hundred pounds and give you your year. It ’ud be a speculation. But there—there—where’d my security be? No, that’s all nonsense.”

Claudius went off with something under ten pounds in his pockets. Instead of two rooms in Bloomsbury he now took one small and dirty room in a back street in the Fulham neighbourhood. Here he almost starved

himself and constantly overworked himself. He had intended at one time to write his novel to make his living; now he chiefly wanted to live in order to write his novel well. It was, as it were, a race against time, to get the novel finished as he would have it before the little money that he had gave out. Hopelessly improvident and unpractical, he made no calculation for a possible future when the novel might be finished and prove a failure. His experiences in those lower strata of London in which he now lived had helped to make him bitter and angry with the world, so that he told himself that when his novel was finished he would no longer want to live in the world at all. It seemed to be a world in which there was no generosity, and no sense of what was really valuable. To guess the motives of those with whom he came in contact, he persuaded himself that he had only to guess the meanest possible in order to be always right. The struggle for life hardly seemed worth while. Sore as he still was at the treatment he had received from

his father, his depression was further increased by his miserable surroundings, his semi-starvation, his occasional loss of his belief in his power to write at all, and his terrible loneliness.

This latter was his own proud and foolish fault. It is true that the friends he might have had in London were quite singularly few, but still there were some. Partly from the belief that he would work best if he worked alone, and still more from a reluctance to meet in his adversity those whom he had known in his prosperity, or to discuss the quarrel with his father, Claudius had kept to himself. Otherwise Burnage, to do him justice, would have been willing—staunch and loyal—to have walked hand-in-hand with this lonely embryo-novelist until that point when Claudius really needed a friend. Lady Verrider, an old friend of the Sandell family, a kindly and worldly woman who was fond of Claudius, would have gone with him much further; and there were others, of less importance, who would have been glad to see him. But Claudius

would have none of them. The lower he sank in poverty and dejection, the more obstinate he became on this point. He had much the same instinct that makes the wounded animal hide itself.

On the day that the novel was finished, Claudius sent it off to a publishing firm. It came back almost directly, and he sent it to another. He paid his landlady, and had one shilling left in his pocket. And now he thought that he could die quite easily, and soon found that he could not. He was young, and unable to rid himself of the instinctive love of life. There were many ways in which a man of good character and education and some abilities could make a fair livelihood. None of them appealed to his tastes particularly, but he determined to adopt one of them—any one; only it was necessary to have a little money first: he must be able to buy an outfit and pay a railway fare, or he could do nothing. If the publishers accepted his novel, he determined to sink his pride and ask for an advance from

them. This was his only chance ; he had in his letter to them asked them to let him have their opinion as soon as possible, and somehow or other he must hang on until their letter came. He had only one shilling on which to wait ; to speak accurately, he had only elevenpence, for the landlady had intimated that she would charge one penny for taking in the letter for him when he was no longer her lodger. As it was necessary to make his elevenpence last as long as possible, he considered that it would be absurd to spend any of it on a bed ; the early summer had begun now, fortunately, and the nights were just warm enough to make it possible to keep in the open air without killing one's self. He had found a spot away on Wimbledon Common, where it was unlikely that any one would interfere with him. There he slept for nine successive nights ; indeed, he spent most of the days there too, for he found himself too weak to do very much walking about. On the morning of the tenth he had only one penny left out of the shilling,

which the landlady would want if there was a letter for him. He walked slowly to his old lodging in Fulham, and inquired if there was a letter.

There was a letter, and the novel had come back again. The landlady refused to take his penny, and said that he could leave the parcel with her. His first sensation was one of intense delight that he would now be able to buy something to eat. He hurried off; when he got to the baker's shop, he was so breathless that he could hardly ask for what he wanted. He bought a penny loaf and hid it under his coat, breaking bits off it and eating them as he went along. It was very beautiful bread, he thought.

When he had finished half the bread, he put the rest in his pocket. He had a vague idea that when he had come to the end of the bread, he would have come to the end of everything. It was with the greatest difficulty that he walked back to Wimbledon Common. There, among some furze bushes, out of sight, he lay down. Late in the evening he finished

his bread. He did not sleep that night, but in the early morning he dozed off for an hour or two. When he awoke, the world seemed to be very far off; nothing that he had ever said or done seemed to him to be quite real. There was no gnawing of hunger now, and even the instinctive craving for mere life had left him. He did not think about his novel at all, but he noticed very small things: he picked a big leaf and counted the veins in it carefully. A gradual drowsiness came over him, and he had moments when his consciousness seemed to go, and he was not sure whether he was walking or lying down.

It was on that night that—as has already been described—the doctor found him.

* * * * *

Claudius did not tell all this. He gave the bare facts without comment, and hardly recorded at all what his sensations had been. When he had finished, Mrs. Lamb rose, and said quietly—

“That has been very interesting to me, Mr. Sandell. I am sorry that you suffered

so much. You must not suffer any more—life must be made easy for you.”

“It has been already—too easy, I’m afraid.”

“I am tired, and must say good night.”

She gave him her hand. It shook visibly, and even Sandell noticed that she seemed to be with difficulty concealing some emotion. He reproached himself.

“Ah, Mrs. Lamb,” he said, “you must not believe too much in my own story of my own sufferings. One is ignobly tempted to make the most of such things when one is speaking to sympathetic people.”

“No,” she said, “you did not do that. But I certainly am sympathetic. Good night, Mr. Sandell ; good night, Gabriel.”

Dr. Lamb looked at her curiously from narrowed eyes. He looked like a chess-player, hovering over a great and final move, whose attention has been for a moment distracted.

“Good night, my dear,” he said.

When she had got upstairs that night, she hesitated a moment before the door of the room that had been her dead baby’s nursery.

Her thin white hand touched the handle of the door and then left it. She dared not go in. In her own room, she flung herself on the bed; after a minute or two she rose and knelt down. There were prayers which she said in a certain formal order every night. She began the first of them in a low voice.

“Almighty and most merciful——”

Then she stopped suddenly, her whole body shaken by a dry sob.

“God help me!” she wailed. “God help me! I’m a wicked woman. I hate Gabriel! I hate him—hate him! Make me love him again. Take away my sin—my sin that I can’t help or fight against any more!”

Even in the moment of her prayer she felt no faintest hope. This sudden, awful love for Claudius that had come upon her seemed to have entered too deeply, to be part of her, so that not even the fires of torment could burn it out. In great anguish she prayed on.

“Was I not tried enough and hurt enough? Every day I see women in the street that have their babies with them, and they’re

laughing. They don't know that they're driving me mad. They don't know it, but they are. I bore it all when my darling was taken away from me. I bore it all when I lost Gabriel's love, too. Only have mercy now ! Do not let me be wicked ! Oh, God !”

Once more she stopped suddenly. This time she rose to her feet.

“It's no use,” she said. “God has left me !”

She did not sob any more at all ; she was perfectly quiet.

When the dawn stole into her room, hours afterwards, she still lay with eyes wide open. Her hands rested quietly by her side ; all through her sleepless hours she had hardly moved. It was such a little thing to lose one's sleep, when one had lost one's child, and love, and God.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOWNSTAIRS in the study the two men went on talking, long after Mrs. Lamb had left them. Claudius felt himself to be just a shade above his normal state. The difference was very slight—a feeling of unusual contentment, almost of exaltation. Perhaps it was no more than the pleasure that comes in telling of trouble past.

“Sandell,” said the doctor, “in some respects I observe that you are a practical man.”

Claudius laughed. “I’ve never been accused of that before,” he said. “Do you mean it?”

“Well, perhaps I should have put it that, according to my view, you are practical. The world would think otherwise; it would consider that you should have gone to your

friends in London, and bothered them to find you work of some sort ; it would rebuke you for your foolishness in having written a novel when you ought to have been earning money ; it would have asked you why you did not take a post as a master in a private school, or become a cab-driver—my wife tells me that you drive well—since either profession would have brought you a certain income.”

“For that matter,” said Claudius, “they would both have brought about the same income. Well, when I come to look back on my life now, I honestly think that the world would be right.”

“Do you ? Is life, for mere life’s sake, worth living ? Could you, for instance, live on in a state of continual humiliation and obligation ? ”

“Do not forget that I am living in a state of great obligation at this moment. It is true that I will not——”

“There, there—I wasn’t referring to that. If it is any comfort to know it, I will give you the chance to-night to end all the

obligations—even to place me under an obligation to you.”

“I accept it at once!” said Claudius, impulsively.

“No; you must hear about it first. Oh, don’t let’s bother about it just now! Let me see, I was speaking of life for its own sake. There I entirely agree with what must have been your own belief. Life for its own sake is without value. I do not want it. You reached a point in your career in which you lived for your work alone. Believe me, whatever your future fate may be, you will always look back on that period with a great and legitimate elation. For myself, I always live for my work alone. I also should be elated, only I haven’t the time; besides, my work makes me humble.”

“Your work,” Claudius said, “is different from mine. It is so much finer. I suppose that my novel is very bad. I have been too close to it, worked too long on it, to be able to form any opinion about it myself. Now that it is written I hardly ever think about

it. But if it were good, and deserved reward, I should have it. The days of the unappreciated are over. The unseen blush is gone out. I work for myself and get a reward, if I deserve it. You work for humanity at large, regardless of rewards."

"Pioneers are seldom rewarded," the doctor answered. "Ideas don't pay; the improvements on ideas do, and the tinkers are kings nowadays. But I certainly have my reward. You have noticed, perhaps, that only people with imagination lay down wine. The old man in his cellar, storing the vintage that he knows he cannot live to drink, tastes in that moment all its unborn perfections that one day his grandson overhead will praise. The man that plants trees sleeps in imagination under their grateful shade."

He began to pace slowly up and down his study. He went on—

"And I have at least imagination enough to picture the humanity that might be, if my own line of research would do all that it promises. Ah, Sandell, it is well enough that

we should look backward—from man to the anthropoid ape, from the ape to the original bird or reptile: but to look forward is better. We are not at the end yet. I see—yes, in my mind's eye, I actually *see*—this new humanity. It walks erect, cringing to no mystery. It holds the keys of life or death—of heaven and hell. It is the master of its fate, makes its character, moulds its physique, has just what intellect it wills. And all that may happen if I will tell it, as I hope to tell it, some two or three things.”

He opened the window, and looked out in the direction of the lights of London.

“There!” he exclaimed. “There they are, millions of them, away in the smoke, laughing, sweating, living, dying! Each man of them is nothing as an individual. Charles Peace and William Shakespeare were both accidents. Yet how I am compelled—as by some blind force—to love them in the mass! They don't know where they came from or whither they go; they have their hopes about

it, or their fears, or their complete indifference, but not one of them knows."

"Not one," echoed Claudius.

"They don't know their own potentialities. And most of them are half afraid to push the limits of their knowledge. Yes, that is really pathetic—unspeakably pathetic."

"I should have thought," said Claudius, "that the tendency nowadays was the opposite of that—a thirst to find out all that one possibly could."

"Yes, yes—in certain directions."

"Not in all?"

"Not for the average man. He believes in his divine genius and his devilish criminal. He does not want to have them explained away; he does not want to find their origin traced otherwise than directly to God or devil. He will let the doctor give him pills for his body; but he believes that his mind and his morals are exclusively in the hands of God and fate."

"And you do not believe in any of that?"

"At any rate, I substitute 'very indirectly'

for 'directly.' If there is any antagonism between religion and science, it is the fault of religion. It will defend untenable positions, and then—when the positions are lost—assert that it was unnecessary to have defended them, as they were immaterial. That kind of thing makes any man angry who loves truth. At the same time, I do not rail against religion. While your raw medical student is making himself objectionable about the doctrine of the Incarnation, I am studying parthenogenesis. True, I sneered just now at the divinity of genius and the devilishness of the criminal. Neither has the inevitability which belongs to one's idea of a superhuman power. Bring me a genius, and permit me to hit him on the head ; if I hit him hard enough, but not too hard, he will not die ; but his genius will leave him, his books will remain unwritten, his pictures unpainted."

"But the reverse process," said Claudius, "to make a stupid man intelligent."

"By the simple operation required for the removal of a post-nasal growth, a stupid child

may be made intelligent ; the administration of a simple purge may preserve the sanity that a man would otherwise have lost ; by the—but why should I quote these common-places ? You know that the connection between mind and body exists—the connection between fear and the heart, for instance ; between hope and the respiratory organs ; between anger, or melancholy, and the digestive apparatus, is as well known as the connection between thought and the brain. After all, why should I bother you with the starting-points of medical psychology—of my own beliefs, and my own line of research ? ”

“ Really, doctor, I am more eager to find out than you are to tell. I want to know how this research is going on, and how it will end.”

“ It will go on and end in the service of humanity. If I gave you the details, I think that you would regard me rather as a quack than as a doctor—a quack with the restless ambitions of a mad man. Yet remember that the heterodoxy of to-day is the

orthodoxy of to-morrow. What the charlatan falsely pretends to do, the man of science sneers at as impossible; but the man of science of the next generation actually does what that charlatan falsely pretends to do. If I have been ambitious, at any rate I have not been reckless. I have worked—I have won my way step by step. If I was ever tempted to make a theory, and one little fact stood in the path, I have either accounted for the fact or modified the theory, or abandoned it altogether. I have proved theories, on the other hand, that I should have never dared to imagine—they have been forced upon me by the chain of facts—theories that have never even been propounded before. As far as I have got, I could write my discoveries on half a sheet of note-paper; but though they may be few, they are vital. I tell you solemnly, Sandell, that the whole future of humanity depends upon them and what will follow them.”

“Will it be long before you reach the end?”

“I cannot say. At present I cannot get on properly. I am in a position of the greatest tantalization and difficulty. If I had not learnt from my work the utmost patience and humility, this tantalization would be enough to drive me mad. I told you how—the other night—I almost forced the gate. That word ‘almost,’ it comes in and spoils everything. There is one thing that I want.”

“What is it?”

“I want a man whom I can trust implicitly—who will trust me implicitly.”

“I am at your service, doctor,” Claudius answered. “I mean it. You said the other day that you knew I did not tell lies : I would keep your secrets.”

“Ah, yes ; it is proverbial, of course, that it is better not to show children or fools half-finished work ! I should be reluctant to have one of my discoveries known at present, because it could be so easily misused. Still, you must not think that I’m the victim of scientific jealousy. Lord, what a lot there is of that ! Let me do the work, and get the

knowledge—and any one else may have the glory of it. But you must hear more.”

“Well?”

Doctor Lamb sat down again, his great hands interlocked, his eyes fixed steadily on Claudius. You must have had your finger on his pulse to know that he was going through critical and exciting moments.

“Sandell,” he said, “do you remember that when you sold all your personal property, to get enough money to enable you to finish your novel, that you made one offer—ironical, I suppose—which the shopman was foolish enough not to accept.”

“Yes. But my offer was more foolish than his refusal.”

“Your offer was foolish for two reasons. You asked too little. You have probably thirty efficient years before you in the ordinary course of things.” The doctor pulled out a pocket-pencil, and did a rapid sum on his shirt-cuff. “The entire command of your body and soul must be worth to any man more than £33 6s. 8d. a-year. Even

you must see that. You would get more if you simply worked for a few hours a day as a bricklayer's labourer. Then, again, you asked for a year in which to spend that money."

"Yes, too little."

"Too little, my dear Sandell? It was too much—very many times too much. Think what may happen in a year—the countless ties that one may form and find it difficult to break; the entire change that may come over one's opinions, the entire alteration in one's views of life. How could you go back at the end of a year? The temptation to break your word would be almost insuperable."

"Yet, if I had made the senseless arrangement, I should have gone back."

"You would—but you would have rendered it difficult. Besides, that year—that pleasant holiday in which you would have said farewell to the world and your own past—should have been characterized by freedom, as far as freedom could possibly be obtained. You said to-night that you had never tasted real

freedom. You would certainly not have had it if you had lived for a year on a thousand pounds ; you would have found yourself constantly exercising common care to avoid a pecuniary indiscretion. In that last holiday of your life, you should have no common care—at any rate, no thought of money.”

“ Yes, it sounds reasonable. It always interests me to discuss imaginary conditions of life—the moon-life of which we were speaking at dinner, for instance.”

“ Sandell,” said the doctor, seriously, “ the conditions which we are discussing now need not be imaginary. I told you that I wanted a man who would trust me implicitly. I want a man who will trust me so far that he will make over to me, asking no questions, the remainder of his life, for the consideration—eight thousand pounds—that I am prepared to offer. He must come to me as he would come to death itself, putting his past behind him and away from him, giving up himself, body and soul, to me. Twice recently have I found a man who would have been willing

to have placed that trust in me ; but in neither case could I have trusted the man. Sooner or later he would have gone back on his bargain, and, of course, the law would not have helped me. But I trust you. If you give me your word of honour, I do not want other security. I do not offer you more than you are worth to me—indeed, I am not wealthy enough to offer you as much as you are worth. You would leave me under an obligation. I offer eight thousand pounds, and I give you eight days.”

“Are you really meaning this ?”

“Yes.”

“I am to ask no questions about the future ?”

“It would be better not. For your own sake, it would be better that the eight days of holiday and farewell should be without anticipations—that you should be able to shut the future out of your mind. And for my sake—you must place yourself in my position, you know,—it, at any rate, shows me that you place the same confidence in me that I do

in you. Perhaps it is for that reason I ask it. Remember that I risk eight thousand pounds on your word alone."

"True. Why eight days? And I could not possibly take the money."

"On that point you must let me decide. The money is not too much. A thousand pounds a day will make it unnecessary for you to exercise common care; besides, it will be a satisfaction to me to feel that I have paid it. In eight days you will not have time to form new ties, or make new opinions—only time to taste freedom for once in your life, to enjoy deeply, and yet not to that pitch of nausea which comes to those who follow enjoyment for a long period; to say farewell in happiness instead of saying it—as you would have done on the night that I found you—in abject misery. For me the eight days is too long. I am impatient for—for your co-operation. Eight days—the octave that the Church gives to its saints—do not ask for more."

"Well, if I refuse, is there no other way

by which I can repay my obligations to you?"

"Oh, why speak of them? If you refuse, there is an end of it, and I am charmed to have been able to give my medical advice, and my poor hospitality, to such a good fellow as yourself. That is all; that ends it so far as you are concerned. Of course there remains for myself a considerable disappointment."

The doctor's voice was careless: his expression was one of geniality and generosity.

"It is a tremendous thing," said Claudius, slowly. "Yet I do not see why I should refuse. As you say, you found me when—if you had not found me—I should have died, probably. I really speak the truth without affectation, when I tell you that I was perfectly ready and willing to have died then. Very little has changed since. I have been away from all friends for so long, that I have got used to doing without them. I am still cut off from my father and my home. I have never been in love in my life. I am alone in

he world. If I gave my mind to it now, I could probably make a livelihood—enough to give me bare life, without the things in it that I should like. But possibly I couldn't; if I could, I should be serving no good end. If I come to you, you use me, as you use yourself, for the service of man. I have no scientific training, and I do not see how I can help you. But you know that. What you say suggests to me that you may require my assistance in some—well, you know, doctor, it is inevitable that in your research there should be experiments, and I dare say some of them are singularly repulsive. You may require from me good nerves, laboriousness so great that it takes no account of health, and complete secrecy and devotion, rather than scientific attainments. I do not see why I should not leave these things to you.

I have myself had some experience of your unusual knowledge—the rapidity with which I recovered my strength under your treatment was almost miraculous. Still more have I reason to trust your kindness and

humanity—it is not merely the material kindness that I have had from you. I think under difficult circumstances you have shown more delicate regard for the feelings of a foolishly sensitive man than ever I experienced before. You showed no trace even of unkindliness when I spoke of refusing your offer, proving, if proof had been wanted, that your generosity was spontaneous, without a second motive.”

Claudius was not looking at Dr. Lamb at this moment ; the doctor half closed his eyes, and smiled slightly.

There was a short pause. Claudius sat with his eyes fixed on one point of the carpet, then he drew a long breath, and said—

“I put the responsibility for myself in your hands, doctor. I accept. I will take my eight days of freedom, and then come back to you.”

“You understand that you give me your word of honour,” said the doctor, “and that the arrangement once made will not be

revoked? It will be terminated only by your own death or mine."

"Yes."

A deep-toned clock struck the hour of midnight. The doctor stretched himself, picked up a cigarette, and lit it. "Extraordinary thing, Sandell," he said, "the difficulty that two men have who are not used to business experience in concluding a money bargain with each other. They shirk it, and get awkward in their manner, and clumsy in their speech. Well, it's over, I'm glad of it."

"The day's over too," said Claudius, glancing at the clock. "Personally, I'm not sleepy. But it seems to me that I must be keeping you either from your work or your sleep."

"From neither, I assure you. The day was made for working, and the night was made for talking, whenever one wants to talk. If you care to discuss the details, by all means let us do it."

"Well, doctor," said Claudius, "there is very little to say. I shall spend the eight

days in London, probably. When would you like them to begin?"

"Now," said the doctor, laughing. "Of course I don't mean that. Let me see, to-morrow's—no, to-day's Friday. That's the worst of sitting up past midnight; to-morrow becomes to-day, which is damnably confusing. I really don't see why you shouldn't leave me at midnight on Friday, returning, consequently, at midnight on Saturday—eight days afterwards. Then you begin your new career with a new week. One's always despicably hungry to secure these dirty little coincidences."

Both men laughed. "I should like, of course," Claudius said, "to see my friends again in London in these eight days—the two or three friends that I have there. True, I didn't see them when I might have done so; I felt too poor to see anybody, which—now I come to think of it—was vulgar of me. But, still, friends are friends. Besides, how can I say farewell unless I have some one to say it to? And my father decides that

"I have already said it as far as he is concerned."

"By all means see your friends," the doctor replied, cheerfully. "Have as good a time as you possibly can. Remember that for eight days you are absolutely free. In the morning Francis shall go into London for us. He will take the necessary letter to my banker for me, and he will do anything for you that you want—secure you the best rooms in the best hotel, take letters to your friends and bring back their answers, order your box at the opera, carry out any commission you like."

"Thanks, very much. A thousand pounds a day! It is tremendous. What couldn't one do with it?"

"Let us hope that you won't find out the answer to that question, Sandell," the doctor went on. "We are neither of us drinking anything. The formal, necessary, unpretentious whisky-and-seltzer is here, but it doesn't seem to me to be suited to the occasion. I may be old, but I am young

enough to want to drink champagne now. The servants are all in bed, but no matter. Where are my keys? Ah, here! It's a wise man that knows his own cellar. Don't you trouble to come, I'll find what I want."

He was back in a minute or two with the bottle in his hand. "The last," he said, "the very last of a wine that I have revered." With deft fingers he began to uncork it. Both men had for some unexplained midnight reason got into the highest spirits, and they jested like boys over the operation. The doctor filled two tumblers, handed one to Claudius, and raised his own.

"Success to your eight days!" he cried.

"Success to the octave!"

CHAPTER IX.

CLAUDIUS breakfasted late and alone on Friday morning. The doctor had breakfasted long before, and Mrs. Lamb did not leave her room. The doctor excused her on the ground of ill-health, and said that when Claudius returned they would probably be leaving England. "She needs a change."

After breakfast Claudius wrote two notes—one to Burnage and the other to Lady Verrider. Francis was to take them to town and bring back answers. He was also to execute various other commissions for Claudius, and make the necessary arrangements at the bank. Dr. Lamb was much more fertile than Claudius in suggesting what might be done. The doctor had a keen appreciation of the various luxuries and pleasures that eight thousand pounds

would procure. To Claudius the chief point was that the eight thousand pounds would free him from the necessity for thinking about pounds at all. He did not want nearly so much money, but the doctor insisted, and only by this arrangement, carried out exactly as the doctor proposed it, would he be allowed to free himself of his obligations. The doctor had told him very little, and it was useless for him to make conjectures. Possibly he had done a very foolish thing, but there had seemed to be nothing else before him.

It was just before dinner that Francis returned from London. He brought back with him two notes for Claudius. The first was from Henry Burnage. It contained this passage—

“Of course I shall be delighted to lunch with you at your hotel to-morrow. I need not inquire after the material prosperity of any one who can afford to patronize such a place, and I am glad to think that all goes well with you. But why have you hidden yourself like this for so long? It was such an exceedingly

bad thing to do, that there is probably a woman at the bottom of it. And why are you leaving England? But we can talk about that to-morrow. Yes, I still write. My work is not of a class that could be called popular, nor should I wish it to be. I am writing a series entitled 'Inward Incidents' every week, in a new journal called *The Latest Light*. They are impressions of some emotional experiences in the life of a young and sensuous girl. I will bring you a number or two to see, but I dare say you won't make much of them. 'Are you married, or engaged, or anything?' you ask. No, my dear Sandell. Art is my only mistress. It is unaccountable to me, and I do not say it out of any spirit of boasting, but the fact is that I seem to have a horrible gift of seeing right through every woman I meet—an absolute incapacity for being illusionized. The wonder to me is that every other man does not show a similar incapacity. But they do not. Poor Luke Monsett—you remember him—has just engaged himself to his principal's daughter."

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to add that Henry Burnage had carried out his intention and proposed to Angela Wycherley, and that Angela had in the kindest and most considerate way refused him. It had been a great sorrow to Mrs. Wycherley, but her husband, who was not without shrewdness, had quite approved of the refusal.

The other letter was briefer. It was from old Lady Verrider.

“ MY GOOD CLAUDIUS,

“ I’ve half a mind never to speak to you again. I’ve quarrelled with your father about you; and, by way of showing your gratitude, you leave me severely alone for over a year. Well, you always were erratic, and, honestly, I shall be very glad to see you again. Young men always do as they like. Now, I am going to be at home to you on Saturday afternoon, if you will come and have a talk and account for yourself a little, and, in any case, you must dine with me on Saturday night. You shall take in to dinner a good and sufficient

reason for changing your mind about leaving England. I've recently discovered her, and love her, and her name's Angela.

"Always your friend,

"JANE VERRIDER."

Claudius saw but little of the doctor during the day. He had been busy in his laboratory. But shortly before dinner he came into the library where Claudius was reading.

"Your carriage will come for you at twelve precisely to-night," he said. "You forgot to tell Francis when you wanted it, and so I took the liberty. You see I am not going to let you off one single minute of your imprisonment here. At twelve exactly the octave begins."

"Imprisonment!" said Claudius. "Good heavens! what a word for it. Why didn't you let me go to town to-day instead of Francis? I've been dying for want of occupation except when I was driving your bay mare, and then I pretty nearly died for other reasons. You'd better sell her before she kills somebody."

"I shall be selling all three horses before

I leave England. You couldn't have gone to town, anyhow. You haven't the genius that Francis has for doing a whole lot of uninteresting things in the quickest and most practical way, without forgetting any of them. I'm afraid, though, you've been having a rather solitary time of it. I was at a point in my work when I simply couldn't leave it, and my wife——”

“Oh, I hope she's better to-night!”

“She says she is. She will dine with us.” The doctor's shaggy eyebrows contracted a little. “A curious case,” he said, almost as if he were speaking to himself, “a very curious case.”

Claudius did not like to hear the doctor speak of his wife as a “case.” He had a vague idea that to doctors all sick persons were cases, but this seemed to be in bad taste. He changed the subject.

“Doctor,” he said, “Francis brought me back from town a note from a man called Burnage, whom I used to know at Cambridge. I won't say that he was an absolutely intimate

friend of mine, but certainly I thought I knew him fairly well. I wrote to ask him to lunch with me to-morrow—a half-chaffing letter. Well, he sends me back a long and serious reply—the most preposterous stuff—and it puzzles me. Has Burnage changed altogether since I knew him at Cambridge, or have I?”

“Both,” said Doctor Lamb. “As far as character is concerned, it is pretty certain that the boy is not father to the man. It was the ambition of my life at one time to be an evangelical preacher. I fainted on the first occasion when I went into a dissecting-room, and I wrote a letter attacking vivisection to an evening paper. I fell in love several times, and I certainly wanted to make money. Do you mean to tell me that the man who did these things is the man who speaks now? Of course not. Is the girl who flutters under a first kiss the same as the wearisome mammal who’s the mother of your seventh? Of course not.”

“That sounds brutal. But this man

Burnage, he wasn't particularly popular at Cambridge; he went in for despising athletics, which was a stupid kind of thing to do.⁹ But he wouldn't have written that letter then. He went in for being distinctly the man of taste."

"Certainly. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. Carry precision in literary style too far, and you may get the precious and emasculated. Carry truth too far, and, as you observe, you may get brutality. The worst possible taste is the result of an attempt to grow the best possible taste from anything but the best possible feeling."

"I don't fancy that the belief in the change of individuality could be carried to its logical conclusions," said Claudius. "For instance, now, doctor, when I was a boy of fourteen, I, in company with another boy, surreptitiously procured a bottle of whisky. We put a lot of sugar into it to make it more palatable, and even then we didn't like it; and, of course, we had no previous experience of spirits. However, we both of us got

completely drunk. We weren't discovered, as it happened, but we suffered punishment for all that. Well, I laugh about this, and yet for the life of me I can't help feeling ashamed of it. The boy that got so badly intoxicated on cheap whisky wasn't the man I am now. Then why should I feel ashamed of his notions?"

"Why, indeed? To me it seems that it is no more logical to be ashamed of one's past than to be ashamed of one's waste tissues. Be ashamed of your present, if you like, but what has the past got to do with you? You are illogical because you are influenced by a long-formed habit. Habits of thought are just as hard to break off as other habits."

"After all," said Claudius, "it's only a question of a point of view. The illogicality does no actual harm."

"In your case possibly not. But take our method of dealing with the criminal. We tie him tight down to his past, and we do our best to destroy his self-respect, which is the most important factor in the production

of self-improvement. In fact, if we can make the man heartily ashamed of himself, we call him penitent, and we are very glad. When we do these things we say that we are repressing crime or punishing crime—as a matter of fact, we are making crime. One night a clerk—in the ordinary way a respectable clerk—allows the utter pig within him to come uppermost. There may, perhaps, be some exceptional combination of temptation and opportunity. Well, the utter pig is so outrageous that the man is imprisoned. His name is in all the papers. When he comes out he finds not only that his self-respect is gone, but that the conditions of his life have been so altered that it is more difficult for him to get work and be decent and upright. Of course it should be much more easy. Equally, of course, the man's self-respect should be strengthened in every possible way."

"That's all very well, doctor, but what about the habitual criminal? Would it be of any use to take the habitual criminal, slap him on the back, tell him that there was

plenty of good in him after all, and put him into a position of trust?"

"Possibly not. I was not speaking of the habitual criminal. When the criminal has really ceased to be responsible—as in the case of some of the habitual female drunkards that you come across in the police reports—I think medical treatment might be good, occasionally. And in cases where medical treatment could do nothing, obviously the really moral and humane thing is to kill the criminal."

"No one would hear of it."

"No one ever will hear of the obviously right thing to do—they mistrust it just because it's obvious. So we kill the man who has committed one murder. Often he is a man of talent and activity; with strong potentialities for good, a man who might do his part towards human happiness and human improvement. But we let the confirmed sot live and breed more sots. Remember, too, that it is under your penal system that the hardened criminal occurs, and that method

which you considered ridiculous has at any rate never been tried."

"Would you try it?"

"Oh no! It's not much less ridiculous than you think it. It would succeed in a greater percentage of cases than you suppose; but even then the percentage would be very small. It is wrong, because it is working at the wrong end. It is dealing with effect instead of cause, and that kind of mistake is a good deal more common than you would suppose. Even Darwin—popularly supposed to be the exponent of a belief that man sprang from the monkey—curious all these popular suppositions are—made the same kind of mistake in a different use. In the question of sex difference he substitutes a teleological for an etiological explanation."

"Ah," said Claudius, laughing; "it's just as well that we've got to get up and dress! You're taking me too deep."

"Deep! Good heavens, man, we aren't even paddling! Your education—pardon me—was too one-sided. It gave you much that

would like to have and have not. But it was the kind of education which could let you hold a popular and imperfect notion of Darwinism, and could let you be ignorant how far the theories of Darwin have since been modified or corrected."

"And you think that omission very important?"

"Well, yes, for certain reasons. But we will discuss them after dinner."

Subsequently Claudius found Mrs. Lamb in the drawing-room. She was wearing some fine diamonds. They were quite out of place, of course. The doctor raised his thick eyebrows. Yes, it was so—of taste and tact she had very little. Yet the greater things—the things that lie at the back of life—the things that we try to put away because they are too serious—seemed sometimes to rise and at once to claim her for their own, and to justify her. Twice that night she surprised Claudius. At dinner, in the course of ordinary talk, quite suddenly and quite calmly she made a remark that was worse than irreligious: it was

virulently blasphemous. It did not involve the use of any word that a decent woman could not use ; but, for all that, it was indescribably shocking even to the two men, who were neither of them orthodox—the more shocking because it was so utterly unexpected. Claudius was staggered ; for a moment he hardly knew what was happening, and then he became conscious that the doctor was talking to him about steam-rollers and, at the same time looking at Mrs. Lamb, and that Mrs. Lamb seemed nervous and half frightened. For the rest of dinner she was almost entirely silent. She seemed to avoid her husband's glance. Her eyes looked hard and dry.

After dinner she excused herself to Claudius on the ground of her health. She felt tired, and must go back to her room ; certainly she looked very pale. Claudius opened the door for her. The doctor stood at the dining-table, some distance away, absorbed in the choice of a cigar.

“ You have chosen a queer time for leaving us,” she said. “ You should have stopped

and driven over to London in the morning. However, good-bye."

She said it without the least trace of excitement.

He took her hand. "Don't let us call it good-bye. I am coming back. I must have another opportunity to thank you for all your kindness to me. It is *au revoir*, Mrs. Lamb."

She laughed, said that she was not to be thanked at all, and passed into the hall.

Claudius shut the door, and then noticed Mrs. Lamb's handkerchief lying on the floor. He picked it up, and opened the door again to give it her. As he did so, she called from halfway up the stairs—

"Have I dropped my handkerchief, Mr. Sandell?"

"Yes," he said, "and I'll bring it to you; don't trouble to come down." He went up and handed it to her. Without a word of thanks she clutched his arm, and said in a low, rapid voice—

"Listen quickly. You must not come back. For my own sake, for yours. I warned

you before, and you wouldn't believe me. It's a matter of life or death."

"I'm sorry," said Claudius, "but I must not discuss it at all. The doctor wants me, and I have given my word of honour."

"I shall do all I can to prevent your return; I've had ideas. But Gabriel used to say my day was coming, and I know now what he meant. It may come before I can carry the ideas out, and if I fail you *must* break your word. Ah, if I only had time to tell you! It would be less wrong to break your word——"

"No, no," said Claudius, gently withdrawing his arm, "you must not think about this, Mrs. Lamb. Everything will be all right. You need have no fear. Good night again."

She put one hand to her throat for a second, and seemed to be trying to speak again. But she said nothing; she turned and ran upstairs.

"Poor lady!" said Claudius, to himself. She was, he felt sure now, far more ill than

he had supposed. She had evidently not known what she was saying.

In the dining-room he found the doctor, leaning back in his chair, smoking placidly.

"Sandell," he said, "there are two alternatives between which every night after dinner I find it difficult to choose. If I perform a simple amputation of the end of my cigar I find that the draught is good but that the leaf unrolls. If, on the other hand, I make a wedge-shaped incision, at a distance of one-eighth of an inch from the end, the leaf does not unroll, but the draught is less satisfactory. What am I to do? What do you do?"

"Well," said Claudius, "I've tried both ways, and I've always found both of them answer perfectly. But if your cigars won't work, why don't you try a pipe?"

"Sublime in its simplicity! I will. It's only my own method with the irreclaimable criminal adapted. Have some more wine? No? Then let's go into the study, out of the smell of the mutton."

In the study the doctor suddenly changed his tone.

"Sandell," he said nervously, "I've been thinking it over, and I've have an uneasy feeling that I've been taking advantage of you in this business. I hurried you. I rushed it too much."

"No," said Sandell. "When I spoke, I spoke deliberately. The chances of my book are, I am persuaded, worth nothing. As a schoolmaster, or a secretary, I might have scraped up enough to repay you what you have spent upon me, but there would still be much of another kind that could not be repaid, and I have some doubt whether I could stand the life. Doctor, I'm sick of pettiness and struggling; I had so much of it in the months before you found me, and I'm equally sick of working for merely selfish and ignoble reasons. Let me be some good to somebody. The work that you do is great, and if I can help you at all in it I ask nothing better. No, my one objection is that I do not in the least want eight thousand pounds."

“No more of that,” said the doctor. “See here—I don’t want reputation. I only want to get the knowledge. But the reputation will come, and you will not share it. Money too will come, though I shall take no steps to acquire it. You will not have any of it. You are merely taking your share in advance, and you must see your own point of view. The law does not recognize any such arrangement as we have made together. By the law I am wrong, but there are grades in wrongness, and if I did not carry out my side of that arrangement I should be more wrong. If I allowed you to give yourself to me and gave you nothing in return, I should stand condemned by my own moral sense. Curious thing my own moral sense is. Owing to my disregard of individuals, it is never affected by any personal bias, and is always perfectly just. It will let me use any means, however wrong, that are requisite for the great end that I have in view; but it will not let me use means that are more wrong than is really requisite. I don’t ask or expect you to listen

to this, of course. If any man talked to me, after dinner, about his moral sense, I'd go to sleep under his very eyes, and tell him afterwards why I did it. But——”

“Oh, I'm not going to sleep. Very well, then—we let things stand just as we arranged last night.”

“I was more or less in a hurry,” said the doctor, “and consequently I hurried you. But there is some excuse for me. When you first came here, my wife was—for her—unusually well. She—well you saw for yourself to-night. I must get her abroad as soon as possible. And——”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” said Claudius.

They fell to chatting of other subjects. The doctor was, as usual, sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes bitter, and sometimes blasphemous, and sometimes showed the clearest judgment and sense. He began by saying how glad he was that Claudius had friends in London who would help him to enjoy his eight days.

“Otherwise you'd have died of *ennui*.

One can enjoy nothing alone — except solitude.”

“And now I come to think of it,” said Claudius, “I suppose I must make rather a point of not dying?”

“To die intentionally,” the doctor said, smiling, “would, of course, be fraudulent. Otherwise your death would merely end the bargain—I take the risk of that—just as I take the risk of my own death. By the way, death isn’t altogether uninteresting.”

“What is death, doctor?”

“Good heavens, man! if I could define it, I should know enough about it to avoid it for ever. To be out of harmony with one’s environment is to die, if you can stand a definition that tells nothing and means nothing. Death is the price we pay for being multicellular. That’s rather better. The happy protozoan, with his single cell, never dies—never, at any rate, by natural death. The strength of wind blows down the tower, but does not damage the single brick.”

“Yes,” said Claudius, rather impatiently.

“ That accounts for the body—looks at the mechanical side. One knows all that, our bodies are ‘ roll’d round in earth’s diurnal course, with rocks, and stones, and trees.’ But I have a personality, feel sure of it—what becomes of that ? ”

The doctor altered the position of the lamp, and spread out the fingers of his great hand.

“ You observe,” he said, “ the shadow of my hand on the wall. I take away the hand—the shadow goes. That’s the second analogy I’ve used to-night, and I might as well be a curate. However, no matter ! Take away the body and the personality goes. We find them always together—not connected, but simultaneous. Is it unreasonable to suppose that if the body breaks up the personality suffers some similar dispersion ? And,” he added, with sudden passion, “ is there the least comfort, the least satisfaction, in finding that that conclusion, or any other conclusion, is ‘ not unreasonable to suppose ’ ? Damn it, man ! why do you take me on to

the subject of my greatest difficulties? The questions that you ask are just the questions that you may ultimately help me to answer. The thing that most surprises me in man is his lethargic, contented ignorance about some essential points. He has been here so long, and he does not yet know how he gets here, how he goes, or how to influence with certainty and to a really appreciable extent his moral character or his intellectual abilities. There are moments when he cares, and gets very nervous. But, as a rule, he is quite comfortable—sits before the fire, reads the daily papers, and says he is ‘master of his fate.’ Master of his fate, indeed! Never was there a more astounding and audacious lie.”

“Yes,” he said at another point in the conversation, later in the evening, “that is, put in a few words, the aim of my work—to make man master of his fate. Ah, Sandell, I’ve been ordinary enough! I’ve loved a woman. I loved my child, and my child died. I have had delight out of good books and good wine. I’ve felt fear, envy, sorrow,

hate—gone through every experience which could show that I do not transcend humanity. But my work is not ordinary; it is on a higher plane. The time has come for man to hasten his own evolution. For the slow, crude modifications of Nature he must substitute his own thought, his own researches. He must put truth into that boast that he is master of his fate.”

“Doctor,” said Sandell, “you told me once that you believed in God, without giving any definition. Do you believe in the will of God?”

“The phrase,” Dr. Lamb answered, frowning slightly, “is anthropomorphic. To ascribe will to God is to ascribe a limitation which, except to a theologian with his talk of the self-conditioned, must seem futile.”

“Well, put it in other words: Do you believe that there is something which you cannot thwart——”

“I dislike the word ‘thwart,’” interrupted the doctor. “I believe that there is a tendency which man can neither retard nor accelerate.”

“Ah!” said Claudius. “Now, a moment ago, you said that the time had come for man to hasten his evolution.”

“I am not illogical. The time has come—the tendency is here. Thanks to the primitive instincts of reproduction and self-preservation, we have arrived slowly at what we are. Thanks to the evolved mind of man, we shall arrive more quickly at what we shall be. Evolution itself has provided that which will accelerate evolution. The tendency is not accelerated by man, but by itself acting through man.”

“I see what you mean, but how will it happen?”

“If I said that I myself was the point of the new departure, you would probably consider me a megalomaniac; but then you are not yet in possession of the facts. Possibly I may only live to see the bare commencement of the results of my own work, if even that. But I trust I shall not die until I am assured that those results must ultimately follow.”

“Is there any satisfaction to be got out of being the slave of a tendency?”

“Can one be said to be the slave of a master that is doing all that the slave wishes? The tendency is but part of the manifestation of God, and to the man of science in my position the love of God has passed from a religious duty into a logical necessity. God, so far as God is revealed by our knowledge of Nature, is taking man ‘to the haven where he would be.’ Sandell, you’ve often thought me brutal, and once said so. It is because I do not regard the individual, but the race, and what the race may ultimately be. But think whether my view or yours is most in accord with the laws of Nature, the manifestation, if you like the term, of ‘the will of God.’ It is on the just and the unjust alike that the sun shines or the tower of Siloam falls. There is no regard there of the individual. A moment ago you spoke of your personality as though it were so precious a thing that you could not bear to lose it. No, I am not sneering at you. The instinct for self-

preservation is almost universal ; but do not let it make you lose your sense of proportion. Read a manual of astronomy, read Darwin—we all crib his facts even when we correct his theories—familiarize yourself with great tendencies, great numbers, great space. You may still believe that you are something ; but to give that up when your time comes will seem to you—in a delightful obedience that is no slavery—to be far better.”

The doctor, who had paced up and down the room as he was talking, now seated himself, facing the fireplace. He had seemed to speak with sincerity, enthusiasm, almost excitement. But with him excitement did not slowly die ; it vanished like a flame blown out. As he filled another pipe, he remarked, in a matter-of-fact way—

“Look here, Sandell, if you’ll write me a cheque for fifty, with to-morrow’s date, I’ll cash it for you now. You may want small sums to-morrow before it is convenient for you to change a cheque.”

“Thank you,” said Claudius. He did not

quite seem to be hearing and understanding. However, he wrote the cheque, took the notes and thrust them into a pocket, and thanked the doctor again. For a few moments there was silence, and then Claudius said—

“And I’m going away to spend eight thousand pounds—or as much of it as I can—in eight days. When I think of all you’ve been saying, I feel like a bibulous coster, who has come into a little money, and means to go on the burst with it.”

“You will do in your way what he would do in his, but the ways are widely different. Don’t frighten yourself with phrases. Enjoy ! Enjoy !”

Before Claudius could answer, Francis opened the door :—

“Mr. Sandell’s carriage is here.”

Both men glanced at the clock ; it was five minutes to twelve. As Francis shut the door, the doctor said—

“Don’t be impatient. You have tried to earn what you are now going to have, but

you have failed. I know the feeling that you are going through. But remember you will earn fully, afterwards, all the enjoyment that eight days can bring you. Ah! you will do far more than that. Words cannot express the obligation under which I shall be to you, or the delight which I feel in having found you."

They had passed into the hall, as the doctor talked. Claudius smiled drearily.

"How do you know that I shall come back? You must have me watched."

"I know it, because you have truth and courage. You will not be watched, of course. The greater your freedom—and the law will not recognize our contract—the more such a man as you will feel bound."

For a minute or two they chatted; the clock had begun to strike the hour as they shook hands and Francis opened the carriage door. The doctor waved his hand as Claudius stepped into the carriage.

"*Au revoir*, Sandell! Saturday after next, at the same hour. Hope you will have a

good time ; I'll give your message to my wife. . . .”

The carriage drove off. In the window above the entrance doors there was a light. It was the window of the room that had been the nursery. The blind was held back a little ; Mrs. Lamb was watching the lights of the carriage passing down the drive. As the carriage turned on to the road, Claudius thought he heard a cry ; the coachman must also have heard it, for he almost pulled up his horses, and then—probably with a reflection that, after all, it was none of his business—drove on again. The doctor standing alone in the hall heard that cry very distinctly ; it was the scream of a hysterical woman, and it came from the room overhead. He wrinkled his brow a little, and his lips drew back showing his great white teeth. He crossed the hall and took down a light riding-whip. Then he went slowly upstairs, humming to himself. He opened the door of the nursery. On a chest of drawers stood a couple of lighted candles, in tall candlesticks, that Mrs. Lamb

had brought from her own room. On the floor against the window she lay, face upwards—chuckling, panting, sobbing—occasionally speaking incoherently.

Gabriel Lamb closed the door behind him. “Get up!” he said curtly.

“No, no!” she moaned. “Don’t come near me, Gabriel; don’t touch me.”

In four quick steps he had crossed the room and was by her side. She began to scream again. He dragged her to her feet, and as she went staggering away from him with arms wide-spread he struck her savagely across the back again and again with the whip. The immediate effect of this brutality was that the hysterical fit stopped suddenly. She reached the mantelpiece, and stood clutching it and facing her husband. Her bosom rose and fell, quickly and deeply, with anguish in her eyes. But her self-control had partly returned, and when she spoke it was in a subdued voice.

“Why—why have you done this awful thing?”

“For two reasons. When you come to think over it, you will see that you know them both.”

She could think of nothing. The blows that he had given her stung and throbbed; from sheer physical pain she began to cry—quietly.

“Oh, Gabriel, you have hurt me so! you have hurt me so!”

“You had better go to bed now.” He opened the door for her. “I will put the lights out here. Be careful not to drop your handkerchief as you go out this time.”

Without another word she went into her room. The doctor went downstairs, through his study and into the laboratory. He switched on the electric light, flung the riding-whip into a corner, and began work.

CHAPTER X.

As Claudius dressed for the dinner at Lady Verrider's on the following night, he felt that, so far, he had had a pleasant day. He had breakfasted late, had had a delightful ride in the park, an amusing luncheon with Burnage, and a friendly talk afterwards with Lady Verrider at her house, and had just left her in time to dress and return to dinner. It did occur to him once that it was not perhaps worth while to barter the rest of his life for eight such days—but still it had been pleasant enough.

Burnage had been full of questions at first, and Claudius had evaded them. Burnage did not press his inquiries, for a chance was offered him of talking about himself, and he could not bear to miss it. He apologized at

intervals for egotism. He referred rather slightly to his 'Varsity days. "One is so young, you know, when one is young," he said. He was fond of saying that kind of thing; it was not difficult. He knew that if he only adopted the form of the epigram, a humble and stupid world would always give him credit for the point of it. Finally, at the request of Claudius, he read out one or two of the "Inward Incidents," those passages in the life of a "young and sensuous girl." If Claudius had taken them seriously, he would have been of the opinion that Burnage must have lived a very moral life, but have been afflicted with a very indecent imagination. But he did not take them seriously; he chaffed him good-naturedly about them, and regarded them as evidence of merely a passing phase. Burnage served to remind Claudius of the good times he had had at Cambridge, and merely for that Claudius was grateful to him. Burnage's irrepressible superiority was not to be overcome by good-natured chaff.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you have given me an excellent luncheon. The wine has been beyond reproach. Consequently I am sorry to have to be rude to you. But I fear that you are a sojourner in the land of Gath. You have told me that you don't like my cigarettes. They're quite perfect. It's only by the greatest—well, the Turkish Ambassador happens to——. However, I needn't go into that. The dislike of those cigarettes is a mark. Then there is the way in which you receive my little 'Inward Incidents.' You don't understand them. You have gone backward. At Cambridge, I remember, you used to think about writing—to take an interest in literature. Now, if you wrote at all, you would turn out—let me see—a novel with a plot to it, with adventures in it."

Claudius chuckled. "That's just exactly what I have done," he said.

"Ah! Where is it?"

"To tell you the truth, I exactly know but don't in the least care."

"Then you can have given no trouble to it."

"I gave too much, and that's why I want to forget it, please."

"Well, doing anything to-night?"

"Yes, dining out."

"I was to have dined to-night at Lady Verrider's. But I had to send an excuse the other day. I happened to find out that—well, it's nothing of importance, but a girl's dining there who ought not to meet me."

"Why not? It isn't as if you talked as you wrote."

"You misunderstand. Poor little thing—pretty too, in her way! It would hardly be fair to tell you more; and besides, it's nothing, I say."

In the afternoon Lady Verrider had been a little puzzled by Claudius. He had been charming to her as ever; his looks, she thought, had improved as they had passed from boyishness to manliness—most faces, she noticed, coarsened in the process, or else became effeminate. But there had been a

certain reserve ; he had not told her all she had expected. He had explained freely his long absence from her house—he had wanted to give himself up entirely to his work ; and he had, besides, been too poor to see any one. It was with reference to the future that he was so reticent. Where was he going to when he left England ? With whom was he going ? What would he do—if anything—when he went abroad ? He would, he told her, earn the money which he was now spending. For the rest he was afraid that his future was not his own secret, and that therefore it must remain a secret.

“Entangled !” cried Lady Verrider. “A woman ! I see it all.”

“No,” said Claudius, “there is no woman in the case at all. It’s almost a matter of business. Be as kind to me as you always are, and don’t ask me any more about it, or mention to anybody that there is any mystery. It’s embarrassing. I can’t be mysterious. I couldn’t look the part.”

“Yes, you could, do, and always did,”

Lady Verrider answered snappishly. "However, young men always have their own way—I've known that for a long time. Unless, of course, you marry her. M'yes, Angela."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said Angela. Oh, it's lucky that you're coming here to dine to-night! A man dropped out two days ago, and you've got his place. Otherwise there might not have been, as far as you're concerned, any Angela at all. She's your reason for not leaving England, as I told you in my letter."

"Might we hear more?" Claudius asked.

"The father's invisible, and the mother ought to be. No; that's sheer spite and worldliness. The mother's a good mother, with social aspirations—I believe they're chiefly for the daughter's sake, and that, as soon as she's married, the aspirations will be folded up and put away, and the poor old lady will go to bed tired. Looks as if she dressed too youthfully, and always had done—even in her cradle. Homeopath, I fancy—talks pills, anyhow. But quite a good heart."

“And if you had *not* set aside all spite and worldliness,” said Claudius, “how would you have described her then?”

“My dear Claudius, haven’t I said that she’s got a good heart?”

Claudius smiled. “When it comes to mentioning *that*—— But, however, with regard to Angela?”

Lady Verrider’s grey eyes lit up with enthusiasm.

“A wayward lamb. Eyelashes. So wrong, and sweet, and rather discontented, and good! Oh! I can’t describe her!”

“Ah,” said Claudius, “I’ve not deserved these treasures! I’m an outcast.”

Lady Verrider sighed. “If only I could be anything half as romantic as that! But no—— I simply must not talk about your dear father. Temper upsets me. In his last letter he said that he ‘Utterly, absolutely, and altogether declined’ to receive any further communication from me. Think of it!”

“I recognize the idiom,” said Claudius. “Then you’ve no recent news, I suppose?”

“Fairly recent; but there’s no change. That Comby woman has a cottage in your father’s place now. The spiritualistic business goes on. I got that, by the way, from my maid, whose cousin is in service there. I didn’t ask her anything, of course, but sometimes one has to give her the run of her tongue.”

Lady Verrider’s husband had been long dead. At her dinners her brother acted as host, if he was in London. He was a dried-up little man, who drank water during dinner, and one glass of claret afterwards. He knew nothing about horses, something about men, and quite a great deal about women; so he liked best to talk about horses—at any rate, in the first stage of acquaintanceship. In the last stage—there were with him about sixteen of them—you would perhaps find out that he had lived much abroad, fought three duels, killed one man, and regretted exceedingly that he had not killed the other two. He was good-tempered, rather absent-minded, and lived chiefly at his club. “He’s a nice little

man, Geoffrey," Lady Verrider used to say, "and kind and obliging to me, though we don't know each other very well." Lady Verrider looked brilliant that night. She could no longer be beautiful as in her youth, but she had such pearls and old lace as can be had for money, and always seemed more dignified than she felt.

"Don't hurry away to-night," she murmured, as she shook hands with Claudius, "otherwise I shan't have a chance of seeing you. One never sees anybody in one's own house if there's any one else there."

With this enigmatical utterance she turned to shake hands with a member of parliament, who believed that he had rescued her from a bore; everybody who shook hands with Lady Verrider at once believed that he had done something great and right.

Geoffrey Severn emerged from behind a palm to greet Claudius.

"Delighted to meet you again, old man," he said. "Saw you in the park this morning, on the top of a horse. You were in the

distance, or I'd have saluted you before. Going abroad, I hear. Well, well—you'll get tired of it. I did—at least, I think I did. At any rate, I came back to England—and mind you do the same. And, by the way, you're taking in Miss Wycherley, if you would. Know her? Come along, then."

Silhouetted against a shaded lamp, Claudius saw the face of a young girl. She turned as Geoffrey spoke to her, presenting Claudius. She smiled prettily; but as the smile died away her eyes looked rather sad. She was the image of sweet discontent. There had certainly been some fog that evening; the real question was whether it would or would not become any worse. He thought and said with due gravity, that he feared it would. She half opened her fan, and looked down at it caressingly. Then she said, a little shyly, that she hoped it wouldn't.

"We're going out of the land of fogs on Monday," she added, as he gave her his arm; "mamma and I are going down into the country."

“ Really ? So am I,” he said. “ But can you bear to part with London in the season ? ”

“ We shan’t be there for more than a few days. Do you know Guilbridge at all ? ”

“ Yes ; very well. (Here are our places—why *must* one always go to the wrong side first ?) You don’t mean to tell me that it’s to Guilbridge that you’re going ? ”

“ Y-yes.” Rather humbly, “ Do you mind ? ”

“ It’s a coincidence, because I happen to be going there myself.”

“ Still, there’s plenty of room, isn’t there ? I hoped you wouldn’t mind. You see we’ve taken our rooms there now, and I don’t think we can afford——”

Their eyes met and understood. They both laughed.

“ Don’t you think,” Claudius said, “ that you’re being a little severe ? ”

“ Then,” she answered, somewhat inconsequently, “ why did you say that I couldn’t bear to part with London in the season ? Do

I look merely worldly? Has somebody traduced me?"

"I believe," he said seriously, "that I asked the question for much the same reason that I feared the fog was getting worse. It's a humiliating confession to have to make. As for the rest, no one has traduced you. Lady Verrider adores you, and spoke of you to me. You don't look merely worldly."

She drew a long breath. "Ah! please say the last part of that again—slowly."

"As for the rest, no one has——"

"No; go on after 'You don't look merely worldly,' and say some more."

"You don't look merely worldly. You look—but I'm afraid I've not known you long enough to say that."

"Let me see," she said meditatively, "how long *have* you known me?"

"Either five minutes, or five hundred years."

"Well"—with conscious audacity—"make it years, then."

"In that case I may say that you look

like—like your first name, grown a little tired of paradise.”

“Oh, stop! you must go back at once. Away with those years! You’ve only known me minutes, just three minutes, Mr. Sandell.”

“Pardon me, Miss Wycherley, but it must be at least six—probably more. You observe that we are eating salmon.”

Angela laughed. “What a nice idea to measure time by the menu. Now observe, when it’s half-past the caramel pudding, we may possibly speak about myself again. Until then—no. You’ve been to the Academy, of course?”

“Certainly not.”

“A great theatre-goer?”

“Hardly ever. Come soon—soon—caramel pudding.”

“You ought not to say that. Here’s another chance for you. The lady in black satin is my mamma, and Lady Verrider’s a dear too. But you can say anything you like about anybody except those two—and me.”

“Then,” said Claudius, “I shall talk about

myself, and at some considerable length. I've made up my mind to it, and it's your fault."

She lowered her voice and looked mischievous.

"Do you think, Mr. Sandell, that you ought to neglect that quite nice lady on your other side all through dinner? Oughtn't you to—to—give her some of it?"

They laughed again. "Not at all, she's very busy, telling Mr. Severn all about herself. *She* doesn't wait for any caramel puddings. And as he knows a great deal more about her than she does, he's amused and she's interested. It would be brutal to interrupt them."

"Very well. Why are you going to Guilbridge?"

The moment that Angela had said that she was going down into the country Claudius had decided also to go down into the country. To know that she was going to Guilbridge was to know that he also was going there. He had changed all his plans, suddenly, gladly, without the slightest hesitation, and now he

was asked why, why was he going? He hardly knew. He was a little dazed, like a man who is suddenly wakened from sleep and with his eyes half-closed vaguely feels that it is a glorious morning. But he knew, quite clearly, that the reason, whatever it was, was not one that could be told—now, at any rate.

“I think London’s at its worst in the hot weather. I’ve been to Guilbridge before—had the quaintest lodgings there. It’s so jolly to be near the river in the summer.”

“Most lodgings are quaint,” said Angela, meditatively. “The people who let them have always had more bereavements than other people, and everything looks too clean at the beginning of the season and too dirty all the rest of the time. And the furniture is of a type. Our rooms at Guilbridge are of the normal hideousness, I believe. But they look out over the heath. You know it?”

“Ah—it’s lovely, that heath!”

They talked on of the heath, of boating, of riding, of many things—not more seriously than a dinner-table permits, but just a little

confidentially, happy in a kind of tacit understanding that each pleased the other.

“ Ah ! ” said Claudius suddenly, “ the moment has come. It is exactly half-past the caramel pudding.”

“ Yes,” Angela answered, “ that is the time by your plate. But your plate’s a little fast.”

“ Miss Wycherley,” said Claudius, “ you may think that I eat too quickly. You may regret it. But you really can’t mention it—not to me. You’re now going to talk about yourself.”

“ I only said I *might* — There’s nothing to say, too. Oh yes, why did you say that I was like my first name? How could you even know that I had a first name ? ”

“ As for the last question I may answer that I conjectured it. I do these brilliant things at times.”

“ But, listen : you said that I was like my first name. Now my first name is Laura.”

“ Ah ! ”

“ What did you think it was ? ”

“ Angela.”

She had wanted to hear how it sounded when he said it. She had just what she wanted, and straightway blushed slightly.

“It is Angela, really. But I wouldn’t be discontented with paradise, or tired of it—if only I could find it.”

“Does anybody ever find it? I haven’t.”

“Some do. Don’t look at the girl opposite to you, because I’m going to talk about her. Know her? No? Her name’s Eva Murray, and of no importance. To look at, she’s pretty but commonplace.”

“I noticed her a few minutes ago. I grant you the commonplace.”

“Well, most of the time her face has had the usual expression—the expression that a woman puts on with the powder for social purposes. But I caught her just now at a moment when she was neither talking nor listening; she allowed herself a moment’s absent-mindedness. Her story seemed to come up into her eyes; her face was transfigured, ecstatic, and pathetic. It only lasted a moment, and it was not very becoming—made her look

seven years older. She was quite right to change it for that metallic, insincere brightness. But none the less if we were in possession of Miss Murray's private history, we should find a paradise-period in it."

"Really, Miss Wycherley? If you can tell as much as that from a momentary change of expression, I shall be very much afraid of you. Suppose, for instance, that you were to guess all my horrible past."

"One can only guess such things vaguely and occasionally. I—I don't think you've had a horrible past, but——" she stopped short.

"Well?"

"Isn't it quite absurd that we should have a fog at this time of year? I call it perfectly preposterous."

"Perfectly. Well? You had a sentence to finish."

"I'm not quite sure how I was going to finish it: you must let me think."

At that moment the matronly lady on the other side secured Claudius.

"Now, Mr. Sandell, I haven't seen you for an age, and when we *do* meet you *don't* talk to me."

"Ah!" said Claudius, "Mr. Severn has given me no chance. A selfish man, I'm afraid, Lady Dunwich."

"Very nicely put. On a French model, I should say. Now, do you know anything about guinea-pigs? I am *most* anxious to find out about them, and Mr. Severn knows nothing. My daughter Ella (you remember the child) keeps them, or I should say *did* keep them. There were thirteen. They died at intervals—I mean they died one after another. Beautifully kept, died perfect, everything all right—and yet they died. So very annoying to poor Ella. Can you explain it?"

"It looks to me like foul play. It is mysterious—even romantic. Has Ella an enemy? Had the guinea-pigs an enemy?"

"You really suggest the most horrible things. You don't think a good vet.—"

"Oh, his evidence would be useful. You want the police, detectives, the vengeance of the law."

“ But, Mr. Sandell, I assure you I do not ; I refuse, positively, to go to law about anything. I am *not* going to stand up in a public witness-box with a young man in a foolish wig paid to be impertinent to me.”

The hostess was already making her preparations for departure when Claudius got free from Lady Dunwich and turned again to Angela.

“ You have a moment in which to finish that sentence. Please do it. You do not think I have a horrible past, but—— ”

“ It’s only a conjecture. You’ll laugh at it, I think—I’m inclined to think you have something very important at stake just now.”

She rose with the rest of the women. She had dropped a glove ; Claudius picked it up, saying, as he gave it to her—

“ No, I’m not amused at your conjecture—it is right.”

Then followed what seemed to Claudius a waste of time. The man who chatted with him over the coffee thought him slightly absent-minded, as indeed he was. The days of

he octave had suddenly acquired a value for him far beyond the value of material luxury and enjoyment. Plans formed themselves rapidly, one after another, in his mind.

When the men entered the drawing-room afterwards, Angela Wycherley wondered what Claudius would do. She did not want him to come and talk to her just at first. He did not. She saw him go up to Lady Verrider and chat with her for a few moments. Then, at his request, Lady Verrider took him up to Mrs. Wycherley and presented him to her. Claudius was not always reckless. He could do wise things at times.

Mrs. Wycherley found him delightful. He had known their old friend Mr. Burnage at Cambridge. She was the soul of indiscretion, and he heard with a flickering smile that Angela had refused Burnage. On the question of her own health, however, Mrs. Wycherley showed what was for her an unusual reticence. But he understood that she was a sufferer, and was quite sympathetic. He was mildly amazed to find that this was the mother of

Angela, but he recognized that she really had the good heart of which Lady Verrider had spoken. She spoke of her daughter Angela with pride but slightly concealed, and told stories of her childhood. The wayward Angela had had rather a naughty childhood. Mrs. Wycherley was expecting to have a few friends at her house on the following evening—the Sunday evening. She wondered many things, and apologized too much; but Claudius was delighted and said that he would come. Mrs. Wycherley was equally delighted to find that he was going to Guilbridge. He was so considerate, so interesting, had such a pleasant manner. She decided to find out more about him from Lady Verrider. She glanced across at her daughter Angela, and for the moment her imagination ran riot.

The drawing-room gradually emptied. Lady Dunwich and several other guests were going on to a dance. Mrs. Wycherley began to be a little uneasy. The hired brougham (it was never less than that when she dined with great wealth or slight title)

had not come, and was already twenty minutes late. It was not the first time that it had defected. Claudius crossed the room and sat down beside Angela.

"I have been making your mother ask me for to-morrow night," he said. "It was very good of her."

"It was kind of you," said Angela, demurely.

"Yes," he said smiling, "I am never unnecessarily severe with myself, Miss Vycherley. May I say how glad I shall be to meet you again? I think we have some—some explanations."

"Yes," she said, looking down, "we have. And yet—well, you must not think that my unfortunately right guess compels you at all to tell me anything that you would rather not tell."

"Nor to believe that it would be of the least interest to you."

"Mamma is going, I see. Good night, Mr. Sandell." She gave him her pretty hand. "And"—she hesitated a little—"it would interest me."

Mrs. Wycherley wished to know if she might have a cab called—a four-wheeler, please. For some reason or other her brougham had not come, and it was really most annoying.

“One moment, Mrs. Wycherley,” said Claudius. “My carriage is waiting, and I shall not be going yet for some little time. It would be pleased and proud if you would allow it to take you and your daughter home, and then come back for me.”

Mrs. Wycherley was infinitely obliged. It was very kind of Mr. Sandell, and really if it was not giving trouble she thought she would. Reassured on this point, and with her hand warmly shaken, she and Angela departed.

“Son of Sir Constantine Sandell,” she thought to herself, “keeps his own carriage, and is a very charming young man. Obviously much attracted by Angela. Ah! if it could only be!” The poor lady had given up hoping much. To her feminine and most intimate friends and contemporaries she

id frankly that Angela simply would not
ok at a man.

Lady Verrider, Geoffrey Severn, and Claudius
ere left together.

“I say, Jane,” said Geoffrey, “if you’ve
one with me now, I’ve got a sort of half-
ppointment at the club. You might come
ere too, Sandell.”

“You may go,” said Lady Verrider.
You’ve behaved very nicely, and I’m very
ateful to you. Shan’t let you take Claudius
ough, because I want him myself. Good
ight, Geoffrey, and thanks again.”

When they were alone, Lady Verrider went
o the fireplace, rested an arm on the mantel-
iece and gazed into a quaint Venetian
irror. Her back was turned on Claudius
s she spoke—

“Well, Claudius, I’m not blind. I have
eyes and see. I don’t want you to tell me
hat you think of my Angela. I know.
What difference does it make?”

“The future is not in my own hands.
Nothing can alter that—after next Saturday.”

“ You mean that seriously ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I would give worlds to know what hideous trouble you have got yourself into. I have been a friend to you since you were a baby, and you tell me next to nothing. Why do you stop at a hotel, and why don't you stop here with me ? Why should I lose your confidence ? ”

She stamped her foot impatiently.

“ My dear lady, you have not lost my confidence in the very slightest. I should be very glad to accept your hospitality, but my plans are changed. I am going into the country on Monday.”

“ Are you going to the Wycherleys on Sunday night ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Is it to Guilbridge that you are going on Monday ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Knowing that she will be there ? ”

“ Yes.”

Lady Verrider turned round and faced him.

“Claudius, my good friend, I’m going to speak to you very plainly. There is a chance that the girl may get fond of you. I think she will. And then? And then you suddenly leave her without a word, pass out of her life, drop her, leave her humiliated and puzzled. You cannot do that.”

“I do not think there is much chance of what you say. But I propose to tell her as soon as I decently can, at least as much as I have told you.”

“Your intimacy with her seems to have progressed sufficiently rapidly. I know that you cannot do anything dishonourable. I have the utmost faith in you, but you’re human—a man, and not a god; and she is human—poor, pretty Angela. You may explain to her that you cannot marry, but that will not prevent the chance that she may fall in love with you.”

“And,” said Claudius, rising, “I am unwilling to risk on so slight a chance the utmost happiness I have ever had. Do I not speak frankly to you now? The days

are so few that are left me. Trust me a little further."

"I hope the best," Lady Verrider said. "Women go by siege, man by assault. The days are few, certainly, and it is possible no harm may be done to her. But I'm anxious."

"Tell me," she added, "is this a money matter?"

"No, dear lady," he said. "Money could not help me. I know your kindness though, and do believe that I am very grateful for it. Good night."

"Good night, then, Claudius. Let me know if I can help you in any way, and in any case write to me."

As he stepped from his carriage into the hotel, he heard above the sound of the traffic, the clang and chime from many steeples. The first day of the octave was over.

CHAPTER XI.

CLAUDIUS slept ill and rose early. From his brief sleep he had been awakened by a horrible dream. He dreamed that he saw the doctor's face bending over him ; the eyes were wolfish and eager, the lips drawn back a little, the whole expression diabolical. He tried to speak, but could not. As the face came nearer and the horror of it grew on him, he tried to raise his arms and thrust it away, but he was unable to move. Then he awoke ; it had merely been ordinary and typical form of nightmare.

Yet long after he was awake something of this horror from his sleep haunted him. For the first time a suspicion of the doctor and a dread of the future entered his mind. He banished them at once as reasonless. What the doctor required, he told himself, was

an assistant absolutely devoted ; there might be experiments which would require constant watching night and day ; secrets that could be trusted only to one who first forfeited his right to use them for himself. A thousand explanations occurred to him. He had been told that he was to regard himself as a slave, body and soul ; it had been said seriously, and he must be prepared to accept it literally. Yet it was always possible that there had been in the doctor's use of the phrase much of that whimsical exaggeration which was habitual with him. It seemed even probable, and the suspicions vanished. Before the octave was over they were to return again.

After breakfast Claudius chose the inexpensive pleasure of an aimless walk through the London streets. He had much to think about. His point of view had changed. The doctor had been right in saying that a year of freedom was too long, if it was to be one's last year ; much might happen in that time to bind one to earth and make the farewell

bitter. But eight days, one day, even one hour might also be too long. It was little more than an hour that had made the change in Claudius, placed him in the position of one who with the strongest possible motive for living sees the end of life very, very near. He loved Angela though he had seen her but once. "*Quant à nous,*" wrote Theophile Gautier, "*notre avis est que si l'on n'aime pas une personne la première fois qu'on la voit, il n'y a aucune raison pour l'aimer la seconde et encore moins la troisième.*" If Claudius had met Angela but one hour before the doctor spoke of their strange contract, that contract would never have been made. If life meant Angela, then it would be worth while to undergo poverty, sordid struggles, many humiliations, in order to live. Life would then be beyond price. Claudius saw now that among the many mingled causes which had resulted in the contract under which he was bound there was one which he had not suspected at the time.

Yet, in this tragic position, he had no feeling

of tragedy and no unhappiness. He loved, and it was enough. True, it seemed that the ordinary end of love was not for him, but then no lover at first thinks of marriage or possession. Lady Verrider's word of warning was vaguely in his mind—the dim memory of one who was wise from her point of view. He could not bring himself to think that Angela would love him like that. The nauseous vanity of such a supposition was insufferable. He hoped that she would be kind to him and let him see her often. On his part he knew that he was not free to—he hated the banal words—to make love to her. Doctor Gabriel Lamb seemed a shadow, and all the previous incidents of Claudius's life seemed obscure and unsubstantial when he thought of Angela. She was the light. In the joy of thinking that for these few days he would often be with her, he could forget that when those days were passed he was to leave her for ever. On one point he forced himself, however, to be clear—doing this much justice to Lady Verrider. He would take advantage of the strange

guess that Angela had made at dinner the night before to tell her everything. He did not believe that in this point it mattered one straw whether he deceived her or not, but all the same he would not deceive her. She should know exactly how he stood. Until he met her he had decided not to tell any one the story of his contract with the doctor. But if any one could possibly think that he ought to tell Angela, then he would tell her. He would leave it for the night to settle how much and how little he should tell her then. But certainly she should know all as soon as might be managed.

In the afternoon he went to Guilbridge, and took three rooms at the hotel there. He returned and dined in town. Halfway through dinner it occurred to him that he would have preferred another wine, but he did not commit the extravagance of ordering it. Of course, he might have taken the entire hotel at Guilbridge, and ordered the entire wine-list in London. But, perhaps, one of the best proofs that it was not for the thousand pounds a day

that he had sold himself, was that he constantly forgot that he had a thousand pounds a day. The doctor had strangely insisted on his side of the contract—it had little or no interest for Claudius.

Mrs. Wycherley had not a thousand pounds a day, but she had no doubt that her husband had been making money lately—within the last fortnight. He had. In his mild and unpretentious way he had been practically gambling, and gambling for far more than he could have afforded to lose. It is a pity to have to record it, because its effect may be deplorable on those—if any—who hear about it, but Mr. Wycherley had won. Having won, he had decided not to gamble any more, but to stick to his legitimate business. He kept to that decision. Once only in his life did he sell shares which he did not possess in a mine which practically did not exist; once only did he buy shares for which he would have been unable to pay from people who had not got them to sell. These two speculations, although they may not look

promising when stated baldly, put money into Mr. Wycherley's pocket, and left him quite satisfied that dabbling in mines was a dangerous business, and he must never touch it again. He did not tell his wife any of this. He did not want to make her anxious. Besides, in matters masculine and commercial, Jessica did not know anything about anything, and explanations were tedious.

But still she noticed things. Mr. Wycherley one day tasted the party-champagne. On inquiry he found that he had six dozen of it. He sent that six dozen off to a hospital, remarking dryly that it ought to be drunk in some place where the doctors were handy. Also he thought that, after all, he might as well have some wine that he could drink himself. And he ordered that wine. Then, again, he suddenly discovered that the house needed to be re-decorated. Jessica and Angela were to go to Guilbridge while it was being done, and Jessica might have those Oxford Street people she was always thinking

about to do it. No, he wouldn't go to Guilbridge himself. When a man leaves his business, his business leaves him. Besides, there ought to be somebody in the house to keep an eye on the workmen.

Mrs. Wycherley was delighted. "Things are looking up in the city, then," she said.

"We get along somehow," he answered, with a sigh. It was his invariable reply to that question.

He would not let Mrs. Wycherley keep her own carriage.

"Be reasonable, Jessica. In people in our position that would be ostentatious——"

"Mrs. Bodgers," Jessica began. Bodgers, by the way, had joined Mr. Wycherley in that speculation.

"Bodgers is a fool—a fair judge of port, but in many ways sadly wanting in discretion. No; you may have that hired brougham sometimes—well, pretty often. You can fetch me from the office at five, now and then, if you like."

The first time that Mrs. Wycherley and

Angela fetched him from the office, he inquired of them vaguely—

“What’s the name of the place where you get your clothes?”

They suggested several places.

“Ah!” said Mr. Wycherley. “This is more comfortable than the ’bus. Mustn’t do it every day though.” Then he relapsed into silence. But presently he added, “I don’t like your clothes, Angela, and I don’t like your mother’s either. We’ll go and get some more.”

On this occasion he was wildly generous, insisting on Bond Street and the best of everything. On the next afternoon he came back on the ’bus though, and—not to make a penny fare into twopence—walked the last quarter of a mile.

Mrs. Wycherley had a few people to dinner that night, and the invaluable Jameson assisted. After the dinner, Jameson retired to the basement, and spoiled a previously immaculate career by getting drunk on about equal parts of kitchen beer and upstairs

curaçoa. He did not appear again, fortunately, until the guests were gone, and then he attempted to leave the house surreptitiously. That is to say, he took off his coat, folded it neatly over his arm, opened his umbrella, and came up into the hall. Here he paused, possibly to add some further touches to the disguise, and was discovered by Mr. Wycherley. Mr. Wycherley had been inquiring the reason for Jameson's absence, and had been told by a euphemistic parlour-maid that "Mr. Jameson had come over very strange in his manner." Mr. Wycherley was, in fact, looking for Jameson.

"Mister Wy'lly," said Jameson, with dignity, "I've know your family many yearsh, and I'm man as liksh to shee ev'rythin' tidy roun' 'bout me. Ev'rythin' qui' tidy, and then I'm—I'm as I ought to be." He lowered himself into one of the hall chairs. "You'll 'shcuse me for speakin', bur when thingsh are understood, then they're—they're ash they ought to be. And ev'rythin' ought to be ash it ought." With which remarks on the *comme*

il faut, Jameson immediately fell asleep. He was removed from the house in a four-wheeled cab, and he never returned to it.

Mrs. Wycherley, aghast and much upset, said she was deeply and truly thankful that this shocking scene had not taken place when the guests were still there.

Mr. Wycherley said, "Get a permanent man, Jessica—good, but not too expensive. Get him to-morrow."

It was the crowning extravagance. It was this permanent and perfect person who hovered at the doors of Mrs. Wycherley's salon when Claudius entered. Claudius, generally self-possessed, felt himself almost trembling with excitement to-night. He could not, however, see Angela at first. Mrs. Wycherley—breaking in waves on a black velvet shore—shook his hand and was so glad. She handed him on to a clever girl in the wrong pink, with the smudgy complexion that almost always goes with much soul. She talked vivaciously, and so did Claudius. The buzz of conversation around them made

most of their remarks inaudible to each other, but neither minded it much. As Claudius was talking, he caught a glimpse of Angela. She was standing at some distance away in the window, and an undersized young man with yellow hair and a make-up tie was openly and rather nervously adoring her. He was one of the world's understudies, and there were many of them there. However, Lady Verrider had almost promised to come and bring her title. Mrs. Wycherley did not despair of the evening's brilliancy.

Angela was in white satin and silver, and the dress had cost a great deal of money. She was feeling quite all right about herself, as far as appearance went. But her eyes were sad and thoughtful. She knew that Claudius was in the room—had glanced once rapidly at him, found him looking intently at her, and not dared to glance again until she heard his voice and he was shaking hands with her.

“May I be introduced to nobody and talk to you all the rest of the evening?” said Claudius.

“Thy servant is the daughter of the house,” she said, “and has duties——”

“Which I am sure Mrs. Wycherley performs to perfection. Has the daughter of the house also had supper?”

Angela rose, put her hand under his arm, and the two joined the stream flowing supper-wards.

“Isn’t that a charming dress?” said Angela. “I mean the lady right over there in the corner.”

“I should have thought so.”

“You must think so.”

“I have seen one I admired more.”

“Which? What colour?”

“If my audacity may be forgiven, white and silver.”

“Oh, this! Yes, it’s pretty. I tried to dress like an angel, and I’ve come out like a wedding-cake. I didn’t dare to go into supper before, for fear some one would cut a slice.”

“I will protect you.”

“Me? No; protect them. Think of their

disappointment. It's true, though, those that go often to dances and things always become gradually exactly like some dish in a ball-supper. Their dresses are no longer trimmed, they are garnished. Their expressions alter too—get creamy like a mayonnaise, luscious like a macedoine, virulent like a boar's head, patient and vacuous like a cold fowl. Every chaperone looks like a cold fowl. I know one of them will get carved by accident one of these days."

Their talk at supper-time was not much more serious. Angela was happy, bewitching, and in rather mad spirits, apparently. She introduced Claudius maliciously to several people. She had a way of making others fall into her mood. Many dull and heavy people sprang into wit at her end of the table that night, and wondered, when they got home, with approving wonder at the things they themselves had said.

Afterwards Claudius took Angela out on to the balcony. Here striped canvas made a sweet seclusion for two lounge chairs, a

tiny table, a shaded lamp, and a potted palm.

"Well," he said, "and now we are out of the crowd."

"My crowd, please. Poor little struggling crowd! I must go back to it soon."

"Before you go, I have something to tell you."

She leaned right back in her chair, a graceful creature, her pretty white hand playing with her ivory fan. Her eyes had grown sad again, almost plaintive under the long lashes. Her red lips had lost their garb of raillery.

"Yes," she said, "you have. But there is one thing, tell me nothing if you would rather not. We met by chance. I guessed something by chance. I ought not to have guessed—shall we leave it?"

"It would be kind of you if you would let me tell you."

"Yes, then, tell me. I am interested. I guessed that you had something of importance at stake, and—why should I not say it? I have thought a great deal about it since."

“Have you?” he said eagerly. “Have you? I have myself, my life, at stake. No doubt it is chiefly important to myself; but it is more important to myself than I thought once. By a promise given—a contract made—after a few days I become body and soul the property of another man, his to kill or to keep alive, his to do just as he likes with, his utterly until one or other of us dies.”

There was a moment's silence. Angela's eyes were wide open.

“You astonish me!” she said. “It is an airy story. I cannot understand.”

“It is literally true.”

“Yes; that—of course. But I do not understand how it happened—how it *could* happen.”

“The story is long. I don't want you to think too badly of me. When I gave my promise I thought—I thought I was right. I'm sure enough now—God knows!—that I was wrong. It is a long story, but if you have the patience to hear it, I will tell it you.”

Angela rose from her chair and clasped her hands. She was thinking.

"I cannot hear it now," she said, "because we must go back. I am not quite sure whether I want you to tell me it or not. That has nothing to do with patience or interest, of course. I am interested—it is all so strangely romantic! My possible reason for not hearing it would be—be different. Did you not say that you expected to be at Guilbridge?"

"To-morrow. Your mother has promised to bring you to dine with me at my hotel that night. I am hoping to see you very often."

"I wonder why you spend your last days there? No; don't tell me—not now. Perhaps one day at Guilbridge I shall ask you for the whole story. Will you tell it me then?"

"Yes; whenever you wish it."

"You have given me the impression that you are a lonely man, and sometimes that you are unhappy."

“I ought to be unhappy. I do not think I am, strangely enough.”

“I want,” she faltered quickly and suddenly, “to give you my sympathy.”

She stretched out both her hands, and he held them for a second. Her face had grown pale; she looked to him unspeakably beautiful. He checked an impulse, and they passed back into the crowded room together. A formal farewell followed. On his way home he felt glad that he had not made love to Angela Wycherley. Better men have had similar illusions.

After all the guests had gone, Mrs. Wycherley had a talk with Angela.

“We met him last night,” said Mrs. Wycherley, with fat gaiety, “and again to-night, and we’re to dine with him to-morrow; and he means to see us often at Guilbridge, he tells me. I’m sure I don’t know what it means. Perhaps you could tell me, my dear.”

Angela sat down beside her. “Mamma, dear,” she said, “I am going to be serious.”

“What? Is it? At last?”

“To-night Mr. Sandell told me something of his private affairs. He will not and cannot marry——”

“Then why——”

“I wish to see a good deal of him during the next few days. I am grown-up. You must trust me completely.”

“Yes, darling Angela, I *do* trust you. But is this right in him? And is it—is it, dear—for your own happiness?”

“Yes, I think so. The circumstances are strange. You know me, mamma dear, and you trust me. That is sweet of you. Leave this to me, and don’t ask me any more questions now. I will tell you all one day, if Mr. Sandell lets me; and I am sure he will.”

“My dear, this is terribly upsetting. I wonder—no, I won’t ask any questions. Of course, he does not make love to you.”

“Don’t say those words, mamma dear. I do *hate* them so. No, no; he has not.”

She honestly believed it. Better women have had similar illusions.

Mrs. Wycherley allowed herself to be persuaded on every point. In her heart she supposed that there was but some temporary obstacle, exaggerated by Angela's imagination, and that, although Angela might not think it now, she would yet be happily married to Claudius Sandell.

CHAPTER XII.

BEFORE Claudius left for Guilbridge on the following morning, he sent a messenger to his old lodgings, to recover the manuscript of his novel. The motive of living had come now, and come too late. It was his whim to see if the means of living would not come also now, and with a similar irony. The book had been refused, when refusal meant despair. Possibly it would be accepted when acceptance could bring with it no hope. He sent the manuscript off to another publisher. In the note that accompanied it, he said that as he was leaving England, an early decision would greatly oblige him.

At the same time, he despatched another messenger with a note to Dr. Gabriel Lamb. It was only after long consideration that he had decided to send it. The question which

he wished to ask was, indeed, one which, practically, had been asked and answered before. Yet there seemed to him just the barest possibility that the doctor might change his mind, and—if not—it would be something definitely to know the worst. Besides, it was possible that the doctor's answer might throw some light on the future—on what was to come when the octave was over. In the course of the letter Claudius wrote: "Is there any consideration which would make you rescind our contract? If, for instance (though I cannot imagine anything of the kind could happen), some stroke of luck made it possible for me to repay to you twice or three times the sum that you have advanced to me, would you then—if I asked it—give me back my promise? Or is there any other way?"

There were several arrangements besides that Claudius had to make before his departure, to supplement the resources of a provincial hotel, and make things more worthy of Angela. She had mentioned that

she had meant to ride, when she was at Guilbridge, if she found that she could hire a horse that was suitable; Claudius had to make it certain that that horse would be forthcoming, and without any necessity for hiring it. Just as he was leaving for Guilbridge, the man who had taken his note to Wimbledon returned with a verbal message that the doctor would send his reply by post that night.

At the last moment, Mr. Wycherley decided that he would accompany his wife and daughter down to Guilbridge, see them safely established in their lodgings, and then return to dine at his club.

"You don't understand about trains, Jessica," said Mr. Wycherley; "and you might let these lodging-house people be too—too independent. I'll just come down with you and see that you really get there."

So Mr. Wycherley put on a light tweed suit; he had bought it and paid for it, but it did not look in the least as if it belonged to him—guided his wife and daughter safely

through the intricacies of Waterloo Station, and finally conducted them to their lodgings at Guilbridge. There he explained to the landlady that a variety of things which she was sure she had never been asked for before would be both asked for and insisted upon. Then, with a consciousness of duty done, he took Mrs. Wycherley and Angela for a stroll on the heath previous to his return to the station.

Here Claudius chanced to meet them, and he would not hear of Mr. Wycherley going back to the station. He had been told that Mr. Wycherley was not coming to Guilbridge, but as he had come he must certainly stop and dine with him.

Angela seconded the appeal. "Do stop, papa, there are lots of trains after dinner, and you can't eat your poor little dinner all alone in a solitary club."

"There was a chance—well, half a chance—of my meeting Bodgers at the club. I said something about it, and he said something about it—but nothing definite."

“Mr. Bodgers must dine alone,” said Claudius. “A telegram to the club, in case he goes there, and the thing is settled. You really must not disappoint me.”

“And,” added Mr. Wycherley, “I’ve no clothes with me except what I stand up in.”

“That doesn’t matter in the least. I also will dine in this very identical suit, if you like. There’s the last excuse shot dead.”

“Oh, well!” said Mr. Wycherley, with mild geniality. “I’m sure I’m not anxious to make excuses. If you’ll take me as I am, I’ll come with pleasure. Very kind of you.”

The pleasure was quite real on Mr. Wycherley’s part. Young people did not as a rule make much fuss with the little man, or seem particularly desirous for his society. He felt rather flattered.

The hotel proprietor did not feel flattered at all. Claudius had taken some trouble about this dinner; there had been various importations from London which seemed to the hotel proprietor to cast imputations on the quality and extent of his resources. He

ventured respectfully and grandiloquently to remonstrate with Claudius, and he did not obtain a lengthy hearing.

“Go away, and don’t bother,” said Claudius. “I know that what I’ve done is unusual, but no slight to you is intended by it. I must have my own way, and I expect to pay you for the privilege.”

The actual dinner was short and simple. But the wine, the Venetian glass, the linen, the silver and cutlery, the flowers and fruit, even the oak table on which the dinner was served, had all come from London, and the arrangement of the table had been wrested from the hands of the hotel head waiter and given to an imported, superior, and professional person. And this was all done for the entertainment of a mature lady in a tea-gown that looked like a dressing-gown—or it may have been a dressing-gown that looked like a tea-gown—a young girl in pink, a young man in a tweed suit, and another tweed suit with an older man lurking in its interior. But then the girl in pink had

eyelashes, and very pretty ways, and was sympathetic. Even the hotel proprietor could see this.

And he was stirred to emulation. He himself stood in the kitchen, closely inspecting, wisely directing, even with his own hands adding last touches, while the dinner was being prepared. He himself decanted a bottle of port, that was one of a remaining three, long ago taken out of the wine list and reserved for the most rare and exquisite occasions. The dinner was short and simple, but it was perfect.

"You know," said Mr. Wycherley, mildly, "I was once at this hotel before—came over with Mr. Bodgers one Sunday. But they didn't do me like this. Yet we ordered our dinner carefully—very carefully. Bodgers is always careful about that. This—this is miraculous."

"You flatter me," said Claudius, laughing. "Hotels won't trouble themselves for mere men, I believe: you should have brought your wife and daughter with you."

“No, no,” cried Angela, “I protest against that. I’m not going to be taken about the country as a decoy-dinner even for my own starving father. It’s too sordid a *rôle*.”

Claudius changed the subject. “Now,” he said, “I do take to myself some credit for the view from this window. I think I’ve arranged that very well. Will you please look?”

Through the open window one saw a big yellow moon and a clear night sky, in front the tops of the dark trees in the garden outside and beyond the dim low hills.

“Now that *is* nice,” said Mrs. Wycherley.

“You don’t think,” asked Claudius, “that it would have improved the composition of the picture if I had put my moon a little more to the right?”

“Don’t be irreverent, Mr. Sandell,” said Angela, reprovingly. “It’s two far-awayly lovely!” She sighed. “I don’t think any of us deserve it, except, perhaps, me.”

“Ah, well,” Mr. Wycherley said, “views are not a thing that I’m much of a judge of. Now this port——”

“That is to remind us that we are to leave them to drink it, Angela,” said Mrs. Wycherley. They passed into the next room.

Mr. Wycherley settled himself again and filled his glass.

“This port,” he continued, “is not the port that they gave my friend and myself when we were here, Mr. Sandell. Shouldn’t have believed a country hotel had got any of it.”

“I seem to be particularly lucky,” said Claudius.

Mr. Wycherley rolled the wine round in his glass meditatively.

“Luck,” he said, “I wish there wasn’t such a thing. It’s the ruin of legitimate business.”

Claudius led him out on this subject. It was Mr. Wycherley’s own subject, and he talked exceedingly well upon it. In a dry and unpretentious way he gave Claudius glimpses of the romantic side of commerce. He had stories of the mining market that were worth telling, and he told them. When

he paused Claudius started him afresh. On the subject that he thoroughly understood Mr. Wycherley became fascinating and interesting. He was, it appeared, strongly opposed to avoidable gambling.

“Of course,” he said, “all business is nowadays more or less of the nature of a gamble. But there is avoidable speculation, and the number of men that go in for it is astounding. Some make fortunes, more get broken. I won’t touch it myself.”

Mr. Wycherley, it will be observed, did not say that he never had touched it.

“A man came to me to-day,” he went on. “It was that friend of mine, Bodgers, I spoke to you about. He wants me to buy some shares that are at present on the rubbish heap. He’s seen the last report from the mine, not yet published, and it’s very favourable. He knows that a syndicate is just being formed in Paris to deal with the shares. I’m convinced that his information is as good as it can be, and I can trust him as I can trust myself. But for all that I’m not going to touch it.”

When they had rejoined Mrs. Wycherley and Angela in the next room, Angela told her father that he had been behaving very badly, and she had a great mind to send him to bed at once.

“Dear me!” said Mr. Wycherley, “what have I done?”

“You have been talking business after dinner, which is wicked of you. No, I didn’t listen at all. You raised your voice once, and I couldn’t help hearing the words, ‘three hundred per cent.’ I won’t have any ‘three hundred per cent.’ after business hours.”

“I never have it during business hours,” replied Mr. Wycherley. “I confess I’ve been talking ‘shop,’ but it is really Mr. Sandell’s fault. When I stopped and apologized, he made me go on again.”

“Oh—oh! How cowardly!”

“But perfectly true,” added Claudius. “I can’t understand this prejudice against talking ‘shop,’ Miss Wycherley. If a man speaks of something that he really and specially knows, and makes it exceedingly interesting, why

should he be stopped with the word 'shop'? Everybody ought—at times, at any rate—to talk his regular 'shop.' ”

“ Very well,” said Angela. “ If he really has been interesting, he may sit up a little longer. I wonder what my own particular 'shop' is ? ”

“ You professed,” Claudius said, “ to have a special gift for appreciating the moon. I don't know whether there was anything in it.”

“ And, by the way,” Mrs. Wycherley remarked, “ what a pity it is we can't see it from this room ! So pretty it was.”

Claudius suggested the hotel garden. The night was fine and warm, and Mrs. Wycherley was sure it would be most pleasant. All four went downstairs, and out into the gravel walk. Here Claudius and Angela passed on in front. When they were out of hearing Mr. Wycherley said—

“ Don't know when I've enjoyed an evening so much, Jessica. Most pleasant and sensible young man, that. Who is he, by the way ? ”

“Son of Sir Constantine Sandell, my dear, and a great friend of Lady Verrider’s. She speaks most highly of him. And money—as you see.”

“Does he want to marry Angela?” asked Mr. Wycherley, bluntly.

“Ah, my dear, that’s where I’m puzzled! There may be a certain something, though Angela doesn’t say there is; but there’s something else rather in the way at present. I don’t know whether you see.”

“I don’t,” said Mr. Wycherley, laconically.

“And I don’t know that I do either, exactly. Angela was really most mysterious. If the child has a fault, it is that she won’t discuss things enough. She wants me to take no step at all, to leave things to her, and one day she will tell me.”

“It sounds all wrong, and rather shady,” said Mr. Wycherley. “If he’s entangled with some other woman——”

“Oh, I don’t think it’s that!”

“It generally is that, Jessica. You see, you don’t know about things. If it is, he has

no business here—for he's obviously here for Angela."

"Shall I speak to her firmly—take her away?"

"No; it is not necessary."

"But, my dear, you said it was all wrong."

"I said it sounded all wrong. You were never exact enough in your language, Jessica. As a matter of fact, it's all right, I believe. It sounds as if he were entangled with another woman, and had no business to be after Angela. On the other hand, Lady Verrider, who is devoted to Angela, introduces him. Also Angela is independent, and takes care of herself. Girls have more freedom now than they had when you and I were young—they've got used to it—don't lose their heads over it. Also there may be nothing in it; and as it's a question of a few days only, we'd better not interfere—unless something fresh and different happens."

"How you do see the reasons of things!" said Jessica, admiringly.

"Besides, I'm much inclined to like the

young man—and I don't often like anybody on sight. If dining out were always like this, you'd get me to dine out more often. Small dinner, no crowd, no tinn'd humbug to eat, and good wine to drink—that suits me.”

Mrs. Wycherley was switched into her favourite topic at once.

“I never had a better appetite,” she observed. “It may be the country air, or it may be the railway jerking being good for the liver, which Maria *always* said. But, for me, I had a capital dinner. And, afterwards, not a touch—not a twinge. You know how it is sometimes.”

Mrs. Wycherley expatiated with some plainness of speech on how it was sometimes. Her husband listened, or appeared to listen, patiently. He was smoking an excellent cigar, and placidity came easily to him.

On ahead, Angela and Claudius walked together. They saw the golden moon through gently swaying branches. The summer night was lavish of its poetry. Angela's voice was soft, and touched with emotion. She spoke

of the most matter-of-fact commonplace things, but her personal glamour made them beautiful to Claudius. She wondered if she would be able to find anything to ride in Guilbridge—perhaps the hotel let out horses. Did Claudius know?

Claudius said that he himself had a little mare there—had bought her because she was beautiful and cheap, though he didn't know what to do with her beyond selling her again. He would be very glad if Angela would try her. On the following afternoon perhaps they might ride together over to Deepwater. Mrs. Wycherley might drive and meet them there. There was a picturesque inn by the river, where they could get tea. It was arranged. And it was all commonplace, and yet it brought back to Claudius's mind echoes of a poem that every one knows and loves—

“I and my mistress, side by side,
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So one day more am I deified.”

And the possible days were few and flying with terrible swiftness.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER breakfast on Tuesday morning, Claudius took the morning papers out into the garden, and stretched himself comfortably under the mulberry tree on the lawn to glance through them. He had had a long swim in the river before breakfast, and had eaten a breakfast that would not have discredited a criminal on the morning of his execution. As he lay there in a light flannel suit, with his pipe in his mouth, and the *Times* open before him, he felt perfectly placid and contented. The day was glorious. In a few hours he would see Angela again and be riding by her side. He was so absorbed in feeling that life was good that he could forget that for him it was so brief. He glanced up for the first time in his life, over a report of the mining market. He wondered which out of the long

list it was that Mr. Wycherley had been told to buy. His eye was attracted by the name Martenhuis Deep. That might be it or might not. Possibly it was not even in that list at all. He flung the paper down and picked up another. He opened it casually, and once more the same name caught his eye—Martenhuis Deep. He noted that the shares were to be bought at 13-16. He recollected at the same time that he knew personally his father's broker. For a few minutes he lay back and reflected. Then he got up and walked briskly back into the hotel. He wrote a hurried note to the broker, asking him to purchase four thousand Martenhuis Deep, and giving the name of his banker. He sent this off at once by a messenger to town. He had never transacted any business of the kind before. He was not even clear if his note was correct, and the commission would be executed, or if he had omitted any necessary formality. By the second post came a letter from Dr. Gabriel Lamb, written in a small neat hand on thick white paper. It ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR SANDELL,

“How on earth did you get the preposterous notion that I entered into our contract in a commercial spirit, and would be likely to close it for a consideration of one hundred, or more, per cent. ? You really do me an injustice. Remember that you were positively reluctant to take the sum that you will fully earn. I had, to satisfy my own conscience, actually to insist. Should I, if I had been commercially-minded, have spent eight thousand pounds on what I might have obtained with equal ease for eight hundred or merely as a return for such poor hospitality and attention as I was able to show you—a consideration of no value whatever except for the pleasure your company gave us. It is a pity, of course, that you have met her—you obviously have met her, you know. Under these circumstances I waited to reply to your letter until I had once more thought the matter over. The notion had occurred to me that you might perhaps (in the event of that ‘stroke of luck’) be able to find

and purchase a substitute. I had to decide whether I would accept a substitute. Speaking quite frankly, any young man of a normal type would, if I could only trust him, suit me just as well as yourself. But I am afraid that I cannot trust any one as well as I trust you. Mind, I have nothing but the word of the other party to the contract. He has but to break his word and he can go. I have no legal hold.

“For the matter of that, you have only to break your word. You are not watched. I do not know whether you have left London for Guilbridge in order to be with her or in order to avoid her—I think the former and hope the latter. Even if I had you watched I should have no power to compel you to come to me next Saturday at midnight and to be mine, to do as I please with. It remains with you—if you break your word, you will not come. Otherwise only the death of one or other of us will end the contract. I need not point out again that murder or suicide would have for you—in addition to

the conventional objections—the objection that either act would be dishonourable. But although I can hold out no hope to you—the enthusiasm of my work which requires you is stronger than myself—I can honestly sympathize with you. You entered into that agreement when you had no motive for living—you have now found the motive. It is possible that within the few remaining days you may have that motive strengthened—possible, even, that you may find yourself in a position to offer me absurd sums to free you, as you suggest. This will make you feel bitter against what the story-teller calls fate, and, though unjustly, bitter against me.

“Believe me, my dear Sandell, the best romance is the briefest. Though I am acting in the interests of my work and without the least regard to your own private interests, I do you a service in saving you from satiety. Come away from life while it is still giving you youth, and poetry, and romance, and possibilities. I myself should have left it long ago had not my work detained me.

“It may interest you to hear that the bay mare, whose temper has daily grown more damnable, has killed the coachman. Did not you say that she would kill somebody? I have never driven her myself—my life is valuable to humanity. The coachman was not a perfect coachman. But his widow has already called twice at the house, apparently with no other motive than to tell me that he would have preferred to live (which I could have conjectured for myself) and to have hysterics on the door mat.

“We leave England next Sunday, and, of course, you with us. I have sold the house, and preparations for departure are already being made. If you happen to come across any really fine madeira, would you let me know, or better still, order twelve dozen to be packed for shipping and sent to me here. I have nearly finished my own wine, and my wine merchant seems to think that I will buy disease and disappointment at a hundred and twenty the dozen. This is quite above the current market quotation for such commodities,

as I have explained to him. I would pay double that to get exactly the wine I want. By the way, there is no earthly likelihood of your finding anything of the kind, but I thought I would mention it on the barest of chances, as you have a palate and understand my taste.

“If my wife were in the room, I am sure she would join me in sending kind regards. Her health is at present a subject for the gravest anxiety. *Au plaisir.*”

“Cordially yours,

“GABRIEL LAMB.”

Claudius read this letter through twice, and put it in his pocket. He walked up and down thinking about it. Certain phrases in it haunted him. His suspicions of the doctor came back again—came back with more force and would not be dispelled. He had strange and horrible fears for the future before him. He could not put them from him till he was cantering over the turf with Angela beside him. Angela was not a very experienced

horsewoman, but she was not nervous. A child would have been safe with the mare she was riding—perfectly made and as kind and easy as possible. In the exhilaration of the ride and the presence of Angela, the worst could be easily forgotten.

From the heath their way lay through a gate into a grassy lane with high hedges on either side. As they approached the gate at a walking pace two youths—humorous louts apparently—shut the gate, latched it, and then ran off laughing down the lane.

“Please wait here a moment,” said Claudius to Angela, quietly.

He wheeled his horse round and then put it at the gate. Over he went and down the lane after those louts.

He returned in a minute, literally driving them before him, with a pleasant smile on his face. Men who smile pleasantly when they have lost their temper are mostly dangerous. Possibly the two louts knew this. Their choice lay between going back to the gate, being ridden down, and pulling Claudius off

his horse; they decided to go back to the gate.

“Open it,” said Claudius, curtly, “and hold it open until we’re through.”

“It was only a joke,” said one of them rather sheepishly, as he pulled the gate back.

“So’s this,” replied Claudius. “Don’t let it go any further than that.”

Claudius rode up to Angela, laughing, and returned through the gate with her. His fit of temper had completely vanished. He flung a coin to the youths as they passed.

“To show them that their civility will pay them better than their humour,” he explained.

“That was rather pretty,” said Angela.

“And rather silly, I’m afraid,” said Claudius. “I don’t know exactly why, but I feel a little like a circus rider in consequence. I expected a bad brass band to begin as I came down the lane, and was rather disappointed that it didn’t.”

“Oh no!” Angela answered. “You were in a very bad temper. Many a poor child

has had its pudding and its pocket-money cut off for less."

"Leave me my pudding, and I will apologize."

"I've got the nastiest possible temper myself."

"I can't pretend to believe it," said Claudius. "You ask too much. But look, here we are at the inn!"

Mrs. Wycherley had not yet arrived. Angela said that she would order tea, while Claudius saw that the horses were properly looked after. They met in the garden of the inn—a picturesque garden, dotted about with tables and chairs and arbours.

"Have you ordered a very good tea?"

"Well," said Angela, "I've done my best. The place looked so tumble-down and old, and out of the world, that I had great expectations of it. I hoped that there would be a surly landlord who would say that he never had been asked for tea and wouldn't give us it. Then I should have persuaded him, and bribed him, and helped to cut the

bread-and-butter, and gradually he would have got to like me."

"It's not impossible," said Claudius.

"But the place is different, spoiled by the patronage of the tripper—ruined by civilization. I gave my orders to a trim little person in a clean London apron, with a lot of nasty little hotel ways. And there was a tariff, mark you, Mr. Sandell, a horrible fixed tariff with three kinds of tea on it—plain tea, tea with eggs, and tea with meat."

"Tea with meat would be extravagant and ostentatious. If you have ordered that, I refuse to pay for my share, or to countenance it in any way except by eating it."

"But I didn't, neither did I order the plain tea, because it sounded dull, and also because I thought it would make the trim person think that we were not wealthy. I went in for the golden mean, which takes the form of eggs."

"And where are we going to have the golden mean?"

"Out here in the garden. I insisted on honey and cream. I prayed the trim person

if only for a few hours to be as pastoral and unsophisticated as possible. And she said, 'Oh, you'll find us quite punctual!' So possibly she hasn't caught the spirit of the thing."

"Possibly not. Why this hunger and thirst after pastorality?"

"Because I'm in the country," she said impetuously; "because all of a sudden I hate horrible, vulgar, complex, social, dirty, striving, mean London life. It has made me so bad, and I want to be better again. Oh, I'm much more in earnest than you think! Really, really, I am! It's been coming upon me lately—and quite suddenly, I know it. I'm a changed girl."

There was a whimsical smile on her face, but her eyes were serious and looking out for sympathy.

"Yes! tell me all about it."

"It would be a heavenly thing to confess everything. You confessed to me a little, didn't you, at our house the other night? I haven't been criminal in spots—no murders

or burglaries, or things of that kind. I've only been mildly always and altogether wrong. I believe I would have been good if the world and circumstances had not spoiled me. I was very vulgar in one way, and very angry with anybody who was very vulgar in the other way. I didn't know the right value of things. I ran after straws that were worth nothing. I see now that nothing's more vulgar than to think much about vulgarity and to use the word."

"This is subtle."

"Subtle! Ah, believe me, I am fairly crying for simplicity. If I could get work as a dairy-maid, not the stage dairy-maid but the real thing, I might save my soul alive. As it is I"—she made a movement of her hands to her throat—"I am choked in London. It's all one game of brag—silly, undignified brag. I've played at it—loathed it—and gone on playing it. Every one tries for an effect, and most of them miss it, and are laughed at for their failure, and those who get it find that it is not worth getting.

One manages and schemes and does humiliating things to secure—what?—less than the fluff on that seeding dandelion.”

“Is this all quite serious?”

“Yes. If you like, it is the cynicism of extreme youth, and therefore counts for nothing. But it’s not assumed, at any rate. I’m being very honest this afternoon.”

With the arrival of Mrs. Wycherley and tea, Angela suddenly changed her tone. She was no longer mournful; her eyes brightened, her talk was full of the brightest and maddest raillery. But as Claudius and she rode back again together, she as suddenly became very quiet.

They had ridden for some time, side by side, without a word, when Angela raised her head and said—

“Mr. Sandell, what are you thinking about?”

“I had the presumption to be thinking about you.”

“What are you thinking about me?”

“That you have as many moods as an April day.”

“Do you mind?”

“I would have nothing altered.”

“You enter into all my moods. When I am in good spirits, you are in good spirits too. How can you do it with the end so near for you? I think I shall ask you to tell me the rest of your story very soon. I have not forgotten it.”

There was a pause, and then she added, “I am in a sad mood now.” Their eyes met, and she read the sympathy that he did not speak. He found himself wishing that the ride might last for ever, on and on in a perpetual quiet summer afternoon. He desired nothing better than the strange exaltation that he felt just now. The ride lasted exactly until half-past six. Angela praised Jeannie, the mare that she had been riding. She thanked Claudius.

“You must ride her again if you like her,” said Claudius.

“She’s an adorable beauty and too good for me. Perhaps. And thank you again, Mr. Sandell. Good-bye.”

Even as he left her he knew that he was to see her again that night. He felt sure of it. After dinner he strolled out on to the heath. It was growing dark, and the twilight was cool and fascinating. He was not surprised to see her standing silhouetted against the sky, a slender grey figure. Nor did she seem surprised as she turned and saw him.

“Are you not afraid to be out alone?”

“No—no, thank you. When we are in the country, I often do this. Mamma writes one letter, and then goes to bed early—and I, if I’m restless, walk until I’m tired. See—I have my own key.”

“Would you rather be by yourself, Miss Wycherley, or, may I——?”

“If you would walk with me, and tell me the rest now—the rest of the story.”

He began at once. He told the story as briefly as possible, wasting no word on apologies for telling it. He told how, an outcast from his own home, a failure in the work he had attempted, with no tie to life,

and no motive for living, worn out by privations and disappointment, he had been found by Dr. Gabriel Lamb. He dwelt at length on the kindness of the doctor and his wife, and tried to indicate the character of the man. He described how the agreement came to be made, and told the precise terms of it.

“Thank you for telling me,” she said quietly, when he had finished. “It’s worse than I had feared. Is there no other way? Can he not be bought?”

“I thought of that—only yesterday I wrote and asked him. Early this morning I ventured on a mining speculation—your father had spoken of such things the night before. I do not care in the least for gambling of any kind—it doesn’t amuse me. I know nothing whatever of the shares I have bought, except their name and present price. I somehow felt sure—it was a silly presentiment, but a strong one—that I was right, and that I should make a profit large enough to buy my release. I had hardly sent off the order to the broker, before

the second post came in. The doctor refuses to cancel the agreement for any money consideration whatever. I believe that he really does not care for money in the least—or for anything very much except his work.”

“Is the name of the mine Martenhuis Deep?”

“Yes—why? How do you know?”

“Because, as we were coming here yesterday, papa asked me jokingly if I should like him to make a fortune. He said he could make one in less than a week by buying Martenhuis Deep, but that he wouldn’t do it, because it was outside his legitimate business. As you were speaking, the name flashed into my memory again. Wait, there is another thing I want to ask you. Will you let me see the manuscript of your novel?”

“I would, but I have sent it off to another publisher.”

“Why—why,” she exclaimed impatiently, “did you not do that before the agreement?”

“The book had been refused twice, and I was quite hopeless about it. But if I had

known that the agreement was coming, I think I should have tried again first. I did not know. It came suddenly—time was apparently of great importance to the doctor, and he would not have waited for the publisher's decision. Then I was under great obligations to him. He had saved my life, clothed me, fed me, treated me with the most delicate kindness and perfect trust. By accepting, I repaid him ; if I refused, I saw nothing before me."

"It is too soon to say yet. But if everything came now—now in these few days—now when it is too late, that would be terrible. Do not be angry with me, Mr. Sandell, for what I am going to say. You tell me that the doctor has no legal hold on you. I think he has no moral hold—that he is not acting in good faith. Have you thought of the possibility of—of breaking your word ? "

"I am not angry with you," said Claudius, with a dreary smile. "I'm no better than other men, and I've thought of it. If I did it, I dare say for a few days I should feel nothing

but relief, freedom, pleasure. The other thing would come though—I should feel that I had broken my promise, betrayed a man who trusted me. I should feel that I had done it through cowardice. It would not be possible to live like that. Perhaps it would be easier to break my word, if he had a legal hold upon me—if I ran the least risk in breaking it—if it were not mere cowardice.”

“Yes, yes ; I see,” said Angela. “I had not guessed what the story would be ; and very often when I have been laughing and—generally silly—you must have hated it, and thought me unsympathetic. You know, when you were at your house, I gave you my sympathy, and I meant it. Only, I did not know that it was quite so horrible or quite so hopeless then, and so, sometimes——”

“Ah ! Do not alter ! Let me be happy for the little time that is left !”

Angela laughed a little mirthless laugh. “I feel,” she said, “as if I had been playing the fool at a funeral.”

“No, no. If you must reproach any one,

reproach me for having done a reckless and suicidal thing, and for having distressed you by telling you about it. I have told no one else."

"I wanted you to tell me about it—I would not have that different. Will you please let me go home alone, Mr. Sandell? Now, please, good night."

Her small cold hand touched his a moment, and she had turned and gone. As he stood still watching her as she walked away, he heard through the still night a faint sound, and knew that she was sobbing.

He went back to the hotel, cursing himself for all he told her, cursing that excellent Lady Verrider for her well-meant advice that had led him to do it. He spent a wretched and sleepless night.

In the letter which Mrs. Wycherley wrote to her husband, she said—

"Angela has gone for one of her favourite evening strolls—just after dinner—but the young never think of these things. A good daughter she always was, but really she

improves. Never corrects me now if I do or say anything that isn't quite as it should be. Less strict she seems to be, and fonder. We have much to be thankful for. Not one touch or one twinge since I've been here—country air and plain food account for it. The cooking is good here with the exception of the gravies—no richness or strength in them; but I've not spoken about it yet."

CHAPTER XIV.

WEDNESDAY morning brought two letters for Claudius. One of them was merely the contract note for four thousand Martenhuis Deep purchased at thirteen-sixteenths. In the report in the morning paper Claudius read : "The chief feature in the mining market was the demand for Martenhuis Deep on Paris buying. After quickly springing to two and five-eighths, there was a slight relapse owing to profit taking. This, however, was nearly recovered in the street, the last price reaching two and a half." Claudius had thought of wiring to Mr. Wycherley, to ask whether he should sell or hold. Then he decided for himself to hold and leave it to luck. Whether he won or lost could not matter to him now.

His other letter was a friendly and informal note from the senior partner in the publishing firm, to which he had sent his novel.

“It is not a common thing,” wrote Mr. Arragon, “for a novel to be sent us on Monday, and accepted on Tuesday. That, however, is the case with your book. On Monday afternoon, I happened to want something to read in the carriage as I drove home from business, and picked up the first few pages of your novel. There were several manuscripts on the table waiting to be sent off to my reader—it is seldom that I read anything myself, and it was the merest chance that I picked up part of your book rather than one of the others. Well, I read these few pages on my way home; and, as soon as I got there, I sent the carriage back again for the rest of it. I finished it after dinner. That was quite enough to decide me. If the book took hold of me like that—and I am fairly hardened—it is certain to interest others. We shall be very glad to publish it.”

The terms offered were fair and business-like—neither unjust nor wildly generous. Claudius wrote to thank Mr. Arragon and accept them. That also could not matter to him now—save that it added to the irony and bitterness of the fate that held and mocked him.

He sent round a note to Mrs. Wycherley, offering her his carriage. Jeannie, too, was at Miss Wycherley's disposal if she preferred to ride. He waited impatiently for the reply. He picked up a book and tried to read—then found that he was turning the pages mechanically, without being in the least conscious of what he was reading. He flung the book down and went out into the road, pacing up and down impatiently. It seemed as if the messenger would never come.

He came in sight at last, sauntering leisurely along until he saw Claudius. The note that he brought was from Mrs. Wycherley. It was brief: it thanked Mr. Sandell very much for his kindness, but neither she nor her daughter would ride or drive that day.

It gave no reason, and suggested no meeting. Claudius at once read into that letter more than poor Mrs. Wycherley had ever intended to put there. It vexed him with a certainty that there was something behind, and an uncertainty what that something was. It seemed cold. Was Angela ill? — Mrs. Wycherley distrustful? What could it be?

To remain still was impossible. He had his horse brought round, and started out. He rode past the house where Mrs. Wycherley and Angela were lodging. He had some faint hope that they might come out or in as he passed—that, if only for a moment, he might speak to Angela. He saw nothing of them. He noticed though that the blinds were drawn in the upstairs rooms. Again the fear came to him that Angela might be ill. His mind was a torture-chamber. Anxiety for her, self-reproach, impotent rage at his fate, burning and stifled passion goaded and maddened him. The octave was drawing near to its end, and the hours were flying wasted away—wasted without Angela. He

turned on to the heath and rode as a man rides who would fain get away from himself—from his own thoughts.

It was three o'clock when he returned. He had come back by the same way he went. Once more he had failed to see Angela. Once more he had noted the drawn blinds. At four o'clock he could endure it no longer. He had decided to call at the house, expecting only to be refused admission.

But Mrs. Wycherley was at home. She was in the garden. If he would walk through the house he would find her there. He found her seated in the shade, in an easy-chair, propped up with cushions that she took with her when she went away from home. She looked benevolent. She was reading a shilling paper-covered book that she had purchased at the station book-stall—"Dainty Dishes: How to Cook and how to Serve them." "It might give me some ideas," she had said to Angela. She laid aside the book (with the title downwards) as she saw Claudius.

“Now this is very kind of you,” said Mrs. Wycherley, “not to have got tired of us.”

Claudius looked for satire in her voice or expression, and found none.

“It was so good of you to send round this morning too,” Mrs. Wycherley continued. “But Angela seemed so tired. No—not ill—merely tired. I thought a quiet day would be the best thing for her. They are bringing you a chair, aren’t they? Yes, I see, that’s right. Oh, Angela—yes! I was speaking about her. A short walk—that really has been all we have done. In this heat, you see, everything is so—so hot. And that induces lassitude. Angela, in fact, is lying down upstairs now. I insisted upon it.”

“I ought to have proposed the river this morning; it would have been cool there.”

“For Angela, yes; for me, I am afraid it would not do. I suppose I am a curiously constructed person, but the rocking of the boat sadly interferes with—with my being perfectly well. As my doctor once said to me, putting it as I thought very neatly, ‘You

have not,' he said, 'got a delicate constitution, but you *have* got a sensitive constitution.' Angela is not a sufferer at all. She adores the river. Now to my mind there is nothing pleasanter than to be driven through beautiful green country in a comfortable carriage. That drive to Deepwater and back really did me good."

"You must try it again." Claudius spoke at intervals, as her babble demanded it of his civility. All the time he was looking towards the house.

And Angela came at last—contemporaneously with the tea-things. She stepped slowly through the French windows and down the lawn towards them. She walked gracefully, her head thrown back. She was pale, and dark under the eyes; her expression was one of patience—new to her, wonderfully appealing.

She shook hands hurriedly with Claudius, and busied herself with the tea-cups.

"I am sorry to hear that I tired you out yesterday, Miss Wycherley," said Claudius.

She smiled and shook her head. "I wasn't tired, and you didn't do it if I was, and besides I've got over it—modelled on the housemaid's excuse for the broken vase." She seemed afraid to meet his eyes; in her manner she was strangely shy.

"And I had meant to tire you again to-morrow," he said. "I thought the river——"

"Ah! the river — I love it — but mamma——"

Mrs. Wycherley would not hear of that objection.

"We might arrange something," she said. She had just been reading in that yellow-covered book a descriptive passage entitled, "The Picnic Pie." A picnic was in her mind. Her imagination built up a lovely entertainment, with the pie as its chief corner-stone, and seated her on emerald moss under an azure sky.

Angela refused the suggestion of a picnic. "Unless you leave the picnic part out," she added, "I don't mind the sward so much, but I dislike the sandwiches. Then there's bother

and discomfort, and one always tears one's dress," she sighed. "Give me peace and a public-house," she said earnestly.

Claudius laughed. Mrs. Wycherley said that Angela was really too shocking.

"But the idea is excellent, Mrs. Wycherley. We go by the river to the inn at Deepwater. You go in the carriage and meet us there. Then luncheon—peace and a public-house."

That was settled. Soon after Claudius left, with some, at least, of his troubles over. Mrs. Wycherley and Angela were not angry with him for anything. Angela was not ill—he would be alone with her on the morrow. All that was good. But each time that he saw Angela made it harder to part with her, and harder to love in silence.

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That night Mrs. Lamb dined downstairs with her husband. She said that she felt better and she looked better, though the extreme pallor of her face was still noticeable. Her eyes were restless and unsteady, and she was very talkative. Throughout dinner he took his

own part in the conversation genially enough, admired her dress, told her a good story or two, and answered readily her questions as to their departure from England. As dinner progressed she seemed to grow rather more excited, and as soon as the servants had gone, she turned abruptly to the doctor, and said, "I want to be forgiven, Gabriel." He looked critically at her, and did not answer. She avoided his gaze, and rambled on—speaking vaguely, at times almost incoherently. She wanted to be forgiven. She had saved him from himself, or believed she had, and he knew nothing about it. She said that she felt that she had to tell the truth now, and that she was compelled to say that she hated him, but she had saved him from himself all the same. She knew he was clever, but it was better to be good, and she was trying to be good again. He might trust her.

Dr. Lamb gave a long, slow yawn. "This," he said, "is becoming tiresome, Hilda. However, as you insist, I will go through it all once, quite plainly, and get it over. You

should not try to be mysterious with me, for you are not good at mystery. You have said more than once that you want me to forgive you. You do not tell me why."

"I cannot."

"I can tell you, though."

"No! no!" she cried, "I will not hear it."

"You will understand your own position, and mine, better if you hear it. You want me to forgive you for your desire to be a much worse woman than you will ever have the chance to be. Claudius Sandell——"

She rose, gasping, looking round her with agonized eyes. She took two or three steps to the window. A heavy curtain was drawn over it. She stood there with her back to the doctor, holding on to the curtains with both hands, her white face pressed against its folds.

"Claudius Sandell does not and never will love you. You are saved from being bad by being—pardon me—insufficiently attractive. Even if he cared for you, it would make no difference, because he is an honourable man, and also—but I need not go into that. Your

own position is, therefore, contemptible, and my position is perfectly secure. His position, by the way, is unfortunate. I had a letter from him the other day, from which I understand that there is another woman. Hopeless, of course. As I have not quite finished, I would suggest that you should sit down. Standing will tire you."

She sat down, covering her face with her hands.

"I pass to the next point. You say that you have saved me from myself—a pulpit phrase, I should imagine. Strange that though you have suddenly passed from a somewhat crude religion to a somewhat crude atheism, you still use the phrases of the religion. If you mean that you have written to Sir Constantine Sandell, I am perfectly well aware of it—could have easily stopped it, but did not care enough about it. Your letter may bring about a reconciliation between father and son, but that will not prevent Claudius Sandell from keeping his word and returning here; and it will not alter my

subsequent treatment of him—your guess as to what that will be is, roughly speaking, correct. It will turn Miss Matilda Comby—a fraud, but your sister—out of a very comfortable berth, and make Sir Constantine miserable. Nothing more than that. Lastly, you say that you hate me. I pass over the impropriety of it. I merely ask you to consider the possibility that the fact—if it is a fact—though apparently of great interest to you, may not be of the least interest to me. Have I made everything clear?”

She nodded her head.

“Then we need not refer to these matters again. That will be in every way better. I am exceedingly sorry to use language to you which is positively rude, and excitement is very bad for you. After to-night there need be no occasion for either. As to your future conduct, I should prefer that you did not tell me I was clever, and also that you did not treat me as if I were a fool—that is to say, do not plot, be mysterious, or undertake the guidance of my actions, especially where my

work is concerned. Always speak to me as if there were a servant in the room. Great though my contempt is for every individual, including myself, I find that my tastes can be best disregarded when they are entirely satisfied, and my tastes are not in favour of Clapham-Villa squabbles with you. I cling, positively cling, to the conventionalities of decent life. There are many men in my place who would have killed you, or tried to divorce you. I myself gave you a certain remedial punishment that you have not forgotten. But violence and scandals, though the violence was necessary in that instance, offend my love of conventionality. I only ask to live (until your day comes) as almost every man of the world lives—on perfectly friendly and civil terms with a woman in whom he has ceased to be interested. You understand? Is there anything you would like to ask?"

Hilda Lamb slowly raised her head. Her fit of excitement and volubility had passed; she looked beaten and suffering. There was blood on her lower lip, where she had bitten it.

“ Ah, God ! ” she wailed, “ if I could only die to-night ! ” Once more she rose, and paced up and down the room. Then she stopped and said—

“ Am I free to do what I like—to write letters if I like ? Are you having me watched ? ”

“ How could you suspect me of such abominable vulgarity ? Of course you are free, and of course you are not watched. By all means write your letter to Scotland Yard to say that your husband intends to murder Claudius Sandell, and has told you so, and will Scotland Yard please come and stop it. If you succeed in making your story sufficiently probable to induce the police to investigate it—which I do not for one moment think—the police will discover that I am about to employ an amanuensis, a Mr. Sandell, as my poor afflicted wife is no longer able to help me.”

“ Yes,” she said, drearily, “ I believe that I am going mad. Sometimes I am mad already. I could do nothing. But I was right then, and it will be murder.”

“My dear child,” said the doctor, “we do not use these coarse, crude, inappropriate terms. That word ‘mad,’ for instance. Consider rather that you are in a state of unstable equilibrium. I apply a certain force, notice, to the saucer of my coffee-cup. It moves slightly, but returns to its original position. Its equilibrium is stable. The same force or stress applied to this wine-glass would knock it over and break it—its equilibrium is unstable. You must guard against stress—against excitement. Avoid violent emotion of any kind. There is no occasion to think or speak of madness. As for the other word equally melodramatic, murder, it is out of place. Supposing that an experiment ends in death—in this case death merely means the conclusion of a commercial transaction. I might also point out that the loss of life to one individual is nothing, as compared with the gain to the race—but I know that you do not take these broad views. Say to yourself that Claudius Sandell has, for a consideration, agreed to help me to verify much which at present is merely theory,

and that you hope all will be satisfactory. Be optimistic—be euphemistic—and you may yet be happy.”

Mrs. Lamb half closed her eyes.

“Gabriel,” she said, “did he—did Mr. Sandell—know about me?”

“About the—tacit but unfortunate compliment that you paid him? He did not—and I should not tell him.”

“Can you tell me the name of the other woman?”

“I do not know it. But in any case he must leave her on Saturday, and he will not see her again. She does not concern any of us.”

“Gabriel, one cannot help thoughts and feeling. One can only try to check them; and, at first, when I could pray, I did.”

He made a little impatient gesture. She went on.

“I have not said or done anything wrong. The rest I could not help; and, perhaps, if you had gone on loving me, or if my baby had not died, it would not have happened. But you are my husband, and you pay for

everything for me, so it was wicked ; and so I asked you to forgive me. And now I want to ask you a favour."

" Well ? "

She spoke very slowly. " Let Mr. Sandell go, and use me instead. I can bear things, and I would not let any one suspect, and I should be glad to die."

" Do you think it probable," the doctor asked, " that I should allow you the exquisite pleasure of dying for him ? Surely it is not to me that you should offer evidence of such devotion. But in no case could I have thought of it, as you are not suitable, not what I want. Is there anything else that you want to ask ? No ? " He gave a deep sigh of relief. " That is capital ; we have been through it all, and got it over. It is half-past nine, and you should get as much sleep as possible." Mrs. Lamb rose obediently. " And after this, no more scenes. We meet to-morrow on ordinary terms—the most ordinary possible—perfectly ordinary. Good night, Hilda." He opened the door for her, and she passed out.

He sat down again, lit a cigar, and smiling he sat there, smoking, he made two observations. The first was—

“ Typical—that connection between religion, self-sacrifice, and the sexual instinct ! ”

The second was—

“ Wonder why I told her to avoid excitement and not think about her mental state ? professional habit, I suppose.”

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. WYCHERLEY supposed that it must have been in consequence of her sitting out in the garden. She did not see how it could have been that ; but, at the same time, if it was not that, what else could it have been ? Anyway, there it was—a slight chill—not so much a cold, she explained, as the beginning of a cold.

“ Deal with these things promptly,” she said to Claudius, “ and you get them over in a day. Keep indoors and in one room as much as possible. Spirits of camphor, light diet, and a little champagne in the evening—that is my rule, and I do not know what it is to have a cold last more than one day. You nip it in the bud, before it really gets hold of the system.”

Claudius was properly sympathetic. Mrs. Wycherley must not, of course, dream of going out. The visit to Deepwater could easily be postponed until the morrow.

But the good-natured lady would not hear of this.

“Why,” she said, “should three people sit indoors for one cold—or, rather, the beginning of a cold—on a glorious morning like this? If you don’t mind conducting Angela, alone and unchaperoned, I am sure you would take good care of her, and for that matter I think she is quite capable of taking care of herself. I told her I should insist, and she’s putting her hat on now.”

“But won’t you be wretchedly dull all alone?”

“My dear Mr. Sandell, if I thought that I was spoiling everybody’s pleasure, then I should indeed be dull. But I assure you I have much to occupy me. I’m working for a bazaar. I don’t know if you ever——”

At this moment Angela entered. She wore white muslin, and it was quite a new dress.

“Mamma won’t let me nurse her,” she said, “and has turned me out-of-doors. I am going back to live with papa.”

Mrs. Wycherley smiled, protested, fluttered, fussed. There were a few moments of amiable and aimless small talk, and as much opposition to Mrs. Wycherley’s plan as civility demanded. And then Claudius and Angela started out.

“This is your own boat,” said Angela, as she stepped into the stern of it and took the lines.

“Yes; it’s mine. Why did you think so?”

“I thought it looked too new for a hired boat; and the cushions are too good; and it’s got several little treats in it that one does not get in a hired boat.”

They spoke further of the difficulty of steering with the sun blazing on the water, of dragon-flies, and of certain popular beliefs as to the bad temper and physical strength of swans. And of all these they spoke with that appearance of great interest that one always shows when one is being more interested in something of which one is not speaking.

After a little while they came to a back-water, and went down it. Here they were quite alone. The dragon-flies flashed across the river over the floating water-lily leaves. The midges in fevered shoals danced out their way. From the high white road in the distance, where a man was driving cattle, and having trouble with them, came the faint echo of an angry shout. In a shady place, with trees meeting over the water, Claudius drew the boat into the bank, and Angela, nestling more comfortably into the silken cushions, thanked him for having found so lovely a spot.

They had both known through all their impersonal talk that the personal question was for them the inevitable question—that on that day, sooner or later, in one way or another, it would arise.

“I have been thinking a good deal,” said Angela, suddenly, looking away from Claudius, and over the water.

“I was afraid so,” said Claudius. “I was wrong, but I know it now, and I’m very sorry for it.”

“In what way wrong? I do not understand.”

“For telling you, even though you asked it, all that I told you on Tuesday night. I knew that you were sensitive, tender-hearted—that the story must hurt you. I knew that by telling you I was not materially benefited. The only thing that can be said for me is——”

He paused.

“Yes?” said Angela, in a low voice.

“Why should I not say it? I could not endure to be in a false position with you.”

A slight flush came and died in her cheeks.

“And, besides,” he continued, “I felt—I think it was the first time in my life—that I needed sympathy.”

“Why should tender-hearted people be cowards?” said Angela. “In order to give sympathy, one must first feel pain, but in giving it there is pleasure: the greater that pain the greater that pleasure. No, you must not reproach yourself. I should be

glad if you would tell me more—if there is any more.”

“We shall soon be at the end of that story. Last night I laid awake an hour and seemed to hear all the clocks in the world ticking out the minutes left to me. There is little that is new since I spoke to you that night on the heath, and what is new is very prosaic. A publisher has accepted my novel. Before I came to you this morning, telegrams passed between my broker and myself. I have sold my Martenhuis Deep—they were up again yesterday — at a profit of twelve thousand pounds. I could repay Dr. Lamb twofold, if there were the remotest chance that money would tempt him.”

“Your book accepted,” murmured Angela, “and fortune come to you — and all too late !”

“If that were all,” said Claudius, passionately. “If that were only all !”

“Isn’t it ?” she said.

“You know that it is not. You must know what I have no right to tell you—

except it be the right of a dying man. It is the love which comes too late—it is that which hurts: Angela, I love you—I who have no right to say it—I love you.”

“I think I knew,” she said. She spoke with quiet serenity, but her bosom rose and fell more deeply and quickly. Her pathetic eyes looked fixed away from him. “And it all goes on,” she said after a moment’s silence, “the shadow of the clouds drifting over the water, and little bits of things floating down stream, and that thrush there singing—just the same. And—in a few hours you will have gone away, and I shall not hear you speaking to me any more, and——”

Just then she broke down. Suddenly she covered her face with her hands—

“I can’t bear it, Claudius!” she sobbed.
“I can’t bear it!”

“Forgive me, dear Angela.”

She let her hands drop, looked at him with tears in her eyes, and spoke, catching her breath here and there—

“But no—if you had not spoken—that would have been harder. Now there’s happiness coming through it all.”

He was as one dazed. “It’s so hard to believe,” he said. “Do you mean that you care—that you love me?”

“Yes—oh yes!” She said it almost proudly, with her sad eyes still looking full into his.

“Though I die to-night,” he said, “I shall have seen Paradise. Do you remember saying that?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“That was the first evening I met you and loved you.”

“Oh, Claudius!”

“All my life through I must have been looking for you.”

“Only two days more. I too—I seem to hear all the clocks in the world ticking out the minutes. Have you no hope at all, dearest?”

He smiled. “I have but to break my word, and I am free.”

She shook her head. "You know," she said, "I could not ask that. Is there no other hope?"

"So little," he said drearily, "that I had no right——"

"Don't," she broke in impetuously—"Don't say that any more. You must not reproach yourself. You have done right in telling me—I feel it, know it. It cannot go on to—to the conventional end, but it's good that you have loved me even this very little while."

Away in the distance a church-clock chimed out the hour. Then near at hand they heard the regular turn of oars in the rowlocks; another boat was approaching; voices and laughter grew gradually more distinct. Claudius pushed out from the bank. They were not far now from the inn at Deepwater, and he rowed towards it in silence. Angela lay back on the cushions, watching him.

Beyond the garden of the inn, with its sly, commonplace, sentimental arbours, was an old orchard. They had their coffee brought

here after luncheon. Angela sat, playing with her coffee-cup; Claudius lying on the grass at her feet, looked up in her eyes and praised her. Their talk was enraptured, full of those endearing words and phrases that lovers use and the rest of the world derides. After a while they spoke of the past, each wanting to know what the other's life had been like.

"Full of the smallest things," said Angela, "until—until this."

"Until I loved you," said Claudius, "my life was worthless—not worth what Dr. Lamb gave me for it—not worth anything."

They praised love—love was the light in life, the stars in the night, the scent in the flowers, the soul in the music. All the truisms come out new when one is living the truth of them. To the dying man *Tempus fugit* is no commonplace.

As they rose, at last, to go homewards, Claudius took her by the hands and drew her towards him. She half-whispered something—he could not hear the words.

"I love you!" he cried. "If you knew how I loved you!"

"I love you!" Her gentle voice came like an echo.

He held her closely in his arms now. Her head fell backward, her eyes fainted, her breathing quickened. He kissed her beautiful mouth.

Together, in silence, they passed back through the orchard, through the garden, to the inn and the river.

In the boat, too, for some time they sat in silence.

"If," said Claudius at last, "by some means—by some means that I cannot foresee now—I can get back my liberty, I shall come back to you. I am bound to you. But you must not think yourself bound to me. You are free."

She held her little hands together like a chained captive.

"I shall never be free again," she said; "I would not be."

"Will you come to me to-night on the

heath?" said Claudius. "I will be by the white beeches—you remember, where I found you that night when I told you my story—and wait for me there. The time is so short, and I must see you again before the day's over."

"Yes," she said, "I will come to you, Claudius."

* * * *

Once that afternoon Angela had said, "I do not think we need tell any one about this. No one else could understand."

Lovers love secrecy, and Claudius would fain have given in to her wishes, but he felt that he had no right in this matter.

"I am afraid," he said, "that you must tell your mother our secret; but not, of course, Dr. Lamb's."

Perhaps no one could have understood. Certainly when Angela tried to do as Claudius had said, poor Mrs. Wycherley was mystified extremely. She sympathized. She said that she could have wished for nothing better than an engagement between her daughter

and Claudius Sandell—who was a kind and honourable gentleman, if Mrs. Wycherley had ever seen one. But was this an engagement? If not, what was it? Oh! couldn't Angela explain a little more? Angela, on the verge of tears, could not. Mrs. Wycherley there-upon roamed into a wild field of hypothetical explanations on her own account. Some of them sounded likely, some were very wild, and all were quite wrong. Then she became expostulatory. Until this obstacle, whatever it was, was removed, Angela ought really not to see Mr. Sandell.

“Well, as you have promised, I shall let you go to-night, just for five minutes—or shall we say four?—well, five then. But, after that, no more—no more at all, until he is free to—to go on as he ought to go on.”

“But, mother,” Angela pleaded, “you’ve told me that you like him and trust him. If I do not see him again after to-night, perhaps I shall never see him again at all, never as long as I live. You can’t understand.

The difficulty is not any of the things you think—not anything he can escape or alter. If not to-morrow, let me see him on Saturday before he goes. It will only be like saying good-bye to a dying man. Oh, I will be good and do what you tell me, but I'm so unhappy, and——” Here Angela, not ineffectively, though the poor child was not acting, burst into tears.

Mrs. Wycherley was sure that she was more distressed than she could express. She blamed herself that it had ever come to this; and how, she asked, was she to know what to say, when she only wanted to act in the way that was best for Angela? What she said at last was that they would be back in London on Saturday, that Claudius might call on them in Erciston Square on Saturday evening, and Angela should be allowed to see him alone then.

When they met on the heath that night, Angela told her sorrows breathlessly, and asked what was to be done.

“I had meant to ask you that,” he replied.

“See—can you read this? I found it waiting for me when I got back this afternoon—it is from Lady Verrider.”

By the light of the wax match that Claudius held in his hand, Angela read the telegram.

“Your father wires me nothing wrong with him, but he would like to see you at once. Do please go to him. Am sure it would be best.”

“What does it mean?” said Angela. “The telegram says that he is not ill.”

“It may mean reconciliation,” said Claudius thoughtfully, “or it may mean that the spirits have advised Matilda Comby to send for me. It may mean anything.”

“Claudius, I think you must go to him.”

“Yes, I think so too, now. If I cannot be seeing you, I will go there—indeed, if it does mean reconciliation, I shall be glad to go. I should love to be on good terms with him again before the end. But, Angela, to think that we have only two days left and

that we are to lose almost the whole of them ! ”

“ Dear love ! ”

As best they could they comforted each other, yet parted with heavy hearts.

CHAPTER XVI.

THAT night, immediately after leaving Angela, Claudius took the train from Guilbridge to London, and then went on by the night-mail north. It was a hideous journey. The man was in a fever, and could not sleep. In following the Wycherleys to Guilbridge, he had acted as those weak fools act who shut their eyes and deceive themselves. It was a bitter reproach to one who had in him the makings of a strong man. He had before him, horribly and vividly, the certainty that he would lose his life, and that life—since now he knew that life meant love—was immeasurably valuable. And above reproaches and above horror, came the exaltation of mutual love. Angela's words seemed to speak themselves again to him. The dawn, coming

pale through the carriage windows, seemed to him symbolical of her farawayness. His life had been like a grey day, working and commonplace; and its sunset was like the gate of heaven; and the night was inevitable.

It was little wonder that he could not sleep.

A servant in livery was on the platform when he arrived—in a slow local train from the junction—and the carriage was waiting for him, although it had been too late for him to telegraph that he was coming.

It was a wearisome drive to Sir Constantine's place. In the hall he found a servant whom he remembered—the old butler.

“Yes, sir, Sir Constantine is in very good 'ealth, sir. He'd expected you'd come by this train. Well, this *is* a pleasure, if I may say so, sir.”

Claudius chatted with the old man for a minute or so; they had always been friends, and it is pleasant to be welcomed.

“Well, now, Gunning,” he said, “what's the news here? How's Miss Comby?”

Gunning dropped his voice. "Gone, sir. Went Wednesday night, after telegrams had been comin' and goin'. Marchin' orders, I fancy. And if I might take the liberty, we're all of us—well, we can live through the loss of her. We'd a fire, too, last night, while you were in the train. But that you'll hear about, sir, and it's not for me to speak. Breakfast will be ready directly; but if you'd like to have your bath first——"

Claudius had his bath, and made his way into the dining-room.

Gunning brought a message that Sir Constantine would be down directly, and Claudius was not to wait. Claudius was in love, but he was also physiologically hungry. He had scarcely begun breakfast when the door opened, and Sir Constantine, noticeably well-dressed, with a newspaper in his hand, sauntered into the room.

Sir Constantine had the face of a dreamer, poetical eyes, and rather a weak chin; he had an erratic sense of humour; his forehead was developed in a way that showed he was

not such a fool as his chin would have had you believe.

He shook hands with Claudius, calmly and quietly, as if they had parted the night before. Sir Constantine had an admirable talent for ignoring anything which he wished to ignore, and it was very soon apparent that he intended to use it.

"While you were asleep in the train, Claudius," he said, "we were having a little excitement here—a fire. That's why I'm late this morning."

"Nothing serious, I hope, sir," said Claudius. He had been brought up to address his father in this old-fashioned way.

"Just a cottage—burned to the ground, and not insured. I dare say it won't ruin us, but still it's a loss, of course."

"But your private wire to the fire-station in the town?"

"For some reason or other it wouldn't act."

"That's a pity. Who had the cottage?"

"No one at the time. Up till the night

before it had been occupied by a woman called Comby. You know nothing about her. She did not arrive here until some time after you had left—for your work.”

Claudius opened his eyes wider. Sir Constantine quietly repeated this pleasant fiction. Claudius smiled and accepted it. The past was to be ignored—or, rather, it was to be altered to suit the taste of Sir Constantine.

He gave a little more information about Miss Comby. He had thought her a deserving woman who had seen trouble, with some knowledge of philosophy—“in which, as you know, my boy, I have always taken an interest.” He was willing to own that he had been deceived. An anonymous letter had arrived—he had telegraphed, and had received telegrams. It was a shocking—a most deplorable and shocking case. He “utterly and altogether declined” to go into it. But he might say that the anonymous letter had stated the actual facts, and in consequence the woman had gone. He dwelt with an ill-concealed satisfaction on the fact that in

the fire at the cottage the whole of the furniture assigned to Miss Comby's use, and even the books which Sir Constantine had lent her, were completely destroyed. He spoke of a poacher seen lurking about the grounds, but Claudius had little doubt who the incendiary was.

After breakfast, Sir Constantine took Claudius round the stables. A pony, he mentioned, had been stolen by gipsies. Then they wandered out into the paddock. At the end of the paddock was a disused slate quarry, deeply excavated, and fenced off some distance from its edge. Sir Constantine climbed over the fence, and Claudius followed; under a tree Claudius saw a neat little governess-cart with a set of plated harness, the cushions, a rug, and a little clock, lying in it.

"What is that doing here, sir?" Claudius asked with some surprise.

Sir Constantine chose to misunderstand the question.

"What is that? Oh, that's the cart that Miss Comby used to drive!" He picked up

the shafts. "Neat little thing, isn't it? Runs so lightly."

He pushed it from him. There was a loud crash from a projecting jagged ledge, and a splash in the deep water in the pit below. The cart had gone over.

"Good heavens!" Claudius exclaimed.

"Careless of me," said Sir Constantine. "Really, very careless." He fumbled for his cigarette papers.

"We'd better send a man to see after it," said Claudius.

"Not worth while." They retraced their steps to the house. The fire—the theft of the pony—the accident to the cart—were all perfectly obvious. Sir Constantine would not allow one trace of Miss Comby to remain.

"By the way," said Sir Constantine, "as that woman displeased me, it might be as well if her name were not mentioned. In fact, I utterly and altogether decline to have her name mentioned in my presence."

"Very well, sir."

“And now what about yourself? You will be here sometimes, I hope?”

Then came rather a difficult part for Claudius. There was so very little about himself that he could tell. It was unfortunate, but he would have to return to London almost at once—he was leaving England on Sunday.

“You will not be away for long?”

“I do not really know exactly. It does not depend entirely on me.”

“Yes, your work,” said Sir Constantine, vaguely. “A man ought to be able to support himself by his work—even if it is not necessary it increases his self-respect. I am glad to see you a capable man. I reverence capacity. You used to have, I remember, a tendency towards—er—writing.”

“I have written a novel,” said Claudius. “It has been accepted, and will be published—and that will be the end of it.”

“Let us hope not. From what I know of your abilities, speaking frankly, I do not think your novel will be either good enough or bad enough for a complete failure. But a novel—

I could have wished it had been a philosophical work."

"I have not the knowledge."

"Nor I—nor I. But I am taking a great interest in it. I have gone back to my Greek. Aristotle is very difficult—so is Plato. I employ the classical master at the grammar school here three evenings in a week, and I also use translations. That is, I have arranged for the classical master and the translations. I only began on Wednesday. But yesterday—though I had other things to think about—I gave some hours to the subject, and I already have the idea. The Socratic gospel—the gospel according to Socrates—in that lies the only real consolation."

He warmed to his newly-acquired pet.

"Not only for the man of education," he went on. "The Socratic gospel is universal. The bricklayer may leave his crude salvationism. The hysterical woman"—he said it without the least sign of embarrassment—"may leave her silly spiritualistic nonsense. The gospel according to Socrates is the gospel

of the future. It may fall to my lot to present it in English—in a popular form. It would be an honourable work. On the title-page, “The Gospel of Socrates. Translated, arranged, and edited for the use of the English-speaking races by——.”

And so he went on, galloping his latest conviction into the land of nowhere. It was half sad and half ridiculous. But the son had known the father for so long now that the exposition neither depressed him nor amused him. It was his father as he had always known him—and now once more his good friend.

Sir Constantine showed very little curiosity. He took it for granted that Claudius would come to see him again—in two or three months, or possibly later. Claudius did not undeceive him. That could be better done by letter, at the last moment.

On the station platform a few minutes before the train came in by which Claudius was to return, Sir Constantine remarked hesitatingly that Claudius looked well—fairly,

only fairly, well-dressed, but well-fed, comfortable. He was very pleased to see it. By this route he arrived at what he wanted to say.

“But all the same, my boy, I don’t want you to be absolutely dependent on your work—your novels—for the comforts and necessities of life. Now I find from my bankers that there has been a very grave irregularity in paying you your allowance: in fact, for some little time it has not been paid. Even the best of banks seem to make silly mistakes and misinterpret orders sometimes. Now I must have my wishes carried out, and I have made this arrangement. I have made over to you the sum of ten thousand pounds. It’s invested, and I shouldn’t alter the investment if I were you. But the money is yours absolutely, and if you ever had any pressing need for a large sum you could of course realize. The interest will be paid into your account at the bank. Strellan, old Strellan, arranged it for me. He thought it the best plan.”

Strellan was Sir Constantine's country solicitor, and his opinion of Sir Constantine's plans was generally complimentary.

"Here's your train," the old man went on. "Now take this"—he drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Claudius—"it's the particulars about the money. Certainly not—I absolutely and altogether decline to be thanked. Merely my duty, and at the same time my pleasure."

He shook Claudius warmly by the hand, and, without waiting a moment longer hurried from the station, as if escaping from the consequences of a shameful act.

Claudius found in his travelling-bag, placed there by his father's hand, a volume of Grote's *History of Greece*, with certain passages marked. On the fly-leaf was scrawled an injunction to him to read the book on his journey and post it back when he arrived.

CHAPTER XVII.

SATURDAY morning was, fortunately for Claudius, full of business. There were arrangements to be made, bills to be settled, and a really good solicitor to be persuaded to do something in a hurry—and the really good dislike hurry. He had to call at the bank and at the publishers, he had a score of trifles that needed his attention. So far he had preserved appearances well. On his journey north and on his return he had spoken and acted in a normal way, had forgotten nothing, given no sign of absent-mindedness, allowed no railway porter or chance travelling companion even the vague idea that there must be “something the matter.” He had gone successfully through the ordeal of meeting with his father and parting from him. But this morning it was different. Every business act was a great

effort to him ; continually he had to recall his thoughts and to concentrate his attention. Sometimes he would find that he had forgotten to say something of importance, and sometimes that he had repeated some needless commonplace—a remark on the weather, for instance—two or three times. But the flicker of a suppressed smile on the face of the man who happened to be talking with him at the time gave him no annoyance. The same thing that made him capable of small mistakes made him incapable of small annoyances. The excitement overmastered him—the excitement of love returned yet hopeless, of fortune gained yet worthless, of life continued yet worse than death, of fate laughing and the end near.

Two letters had reached him that morning at his London hotel by the first post, one—how often he had read it!—was from Angela. Early on Friday morning Mrs. Wycherley had telegraphed to her husband, and he had come at once. First he had seen Mrs. Wycherley alone ; then he had called Angela down and

taken her out in the garden with him. He had seemed serious, but not in the least angry with her; on the contrary, he had never been kinder. He had questioned her, but there had been some questions which she had to tell him she could not answer. Indeed, she had not told him very much. After that, he had left for London. Angela had heard him say, "I shall certainly call upon Lady Verrider this afternoon." She quoted another remark of his, "It's a case, I think, for a man of business and plain common sense, and I am that and very little else." At the end he had tried to cheer Angela up, and told her that all might be well. He could not say for certain, but he thought the case was not quite hopeless, if Claudius could be got to listen to reason. Her little budget of news, told—poor child!—somewhat incoherently, occupied but a little of her long letter. The rest was quite sacred, and quite human, and to Claudius most lovely, and priceless, and sad.

The second letter, which was from Mr Wycherley, ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR MR. SANDELL,

“I intend to call at your hotel to-morrow (Saturday) afternoon at five, and take my chance of finding you. I know that you will naturally be much occupied, but I hope you will be able to spare a few minutes in which to see me.

“I am far from thinking that you have acted, to say the least of it, with discretion. But I do not want you to suppose that I am calling in order to blame you or oppose you. The happiness of my only child is very dear to me, and any obstacle to that must be removed if I can remove it. Believe me, I am only anxious to secure what you yourself must wish. I may be able to help you, and I hope you will let me try. From the little that I have been able to learn, I think that my business experience may be of service to you.”

The letter presented Mr. Wycherley to Claudius as the very image of the completely kind father on the utterly wrong tack; but of course, he determined to see him.

He wished first to see Lady Verrider, but the business of the morning prolonged itself into the afternoon, and it was after four before he arrived at her house. Lady Verrider paced the room. She was beautifully dressed and quite furious, angry and affectionate by turns, and the more angry because she was really fond of him. He had to listen to tirades.

“What did I tell you? What did I warn you? I knew what would happen—what was bound to happen—if you went to Guilbridge. Oh I know that devout lover type so well! It’s going to love in silence, and it never does. It’s going to worship from afar, and it always insists on propinquity. It is determined to be content with very little, and it never is. And if it’s good-looking (as I suppose you are) and takes trouble (as I know you did), it may manage to make some poor girl love it and confess her love. Then the devout lover raises his hat politely and says good morning, and how sorry he is that it can never be, and he had never dreamed that it would come to that,

and he is not worthy, and so on. Then he walks off. Pretty figure, isn't he?"

"My dear lady, I am not that cur exactly. I told Angela from the first that the rest of my life was not mine. Then the time was so short—just a few days—it did not seem possible that any harm could happen. Angela was, and is, so far beyond me that I did not suppose——"

"No, you devout lovers never do suppose that any perfectly ordinary thing can possibly happen. But why did you say that you loved her—why did you tell her?"

"My God!" said Claudius, with sudden passion. "Do you ask me that? Have you never been in love?"

"Yes, I was in love with the man I married. That is one of the reasons why I am so sorry for the poor girls who are made to fall in love with the men that they can never marry."

"I dare say," said Claudius, "that you will tell me that it is the usual formula of the devout lover; but I can only say again that I did not expect what happened."

“Of course,” Lady Verrider continued, “I know in my heart that you don’t deserve what I say to you. But I am angry and miserable. You are not a cur, I almost wish you were. What I am afraid of in you is your silly, out-of-date, romantic, high-falutin chivalry. Nothing but that, I am convinced, could have got you into your present impossible position. I have been talking to Mr. Wycherley—a very sensible little man. He quite agrees with me.”

There was a pause, and then Lady Verrider asked quickly—

“You went to see your father—are you reconciled?”

“No formal reconciliation took place. The past was ignored—you know his way. But we are on the best of terms. He insisted on giving me money—ten thousand.”

“And you also made a small fortune by speculation, I am told.”

“Yes, I made some money.”

“And your novel has been accepted, and Angela would marry you. And just at this

point you disappear, and will not explain why."

"I cannot explain it to you. I have told Angela, and she will tell no one."

"Will you tell me one little thing? You say that your life has been disposed of. To whom? Who is this mysterious man in the background? His name, please—just his real name and nothing more. Tell me that, and the rest I will manage for myself."

"I know you ask it from the kindest motives. I am ashamed not to be able to tell you. If the secret were all my own, it should be yours too, and at once. But it is not only mine. I cannot tell you."

"Oh, I give it up! It is killing me—I am absolutely miserable."

"I am sorry indeed," said Claudius, "that I should distress you in this way."

She stood before the mantelpiece, moving little objects on it restlessly.

"Mind you," she added, suddenly, "you will find Mr. Wycherley far more determined."

“That may be. I am to see him—almost directly. I must be going.”

“He has certain rights now. You have given him those rights—yes, I am glad you told Angela—and you cannot get over them.”

“Dear Lady Verrider, don’t speak as if I wanted to get over them. I’m not a natural martyr. I’m longing to be free and happy. My wishes are just the same as yours and Wycherley’s. If without knowing the circumstances—and I cannot tell him them—he can show me a possible solution, I shall welcome it.”

Then Claudius said good-bye. He assured Lady Verrider that he would do all he could, and reminded her that some unforeseen chance might possibly favour him. But she would not be assured. She had a presentiment, she said, that she would never see him again.

Claudius found Mr. Wycherley at the hotel. “How is Angela?” Claudius asked eagerly.

“She is very unhappy,” the little man replied simply. He was rather nervous at first, observed that the rain still kept off

inquired as to the health of Sir Constantine, fidgetted with his hat; then he put down the hat, seated himself, wiped his forehead, and plunged—

“Now, Mr. Sandell, you know that I have seen my wife and daughter. Jessica is, you may have noticed it, a little inclined to be vague. If I may put it so, she never seems actually to know anything about anything. I’m not finding fault with her for it, you’ll understand. It’s in her nature, and we’re none of us perfect. I mention it, to account for any mistakes I have made in forming my idea of the situation. Angela is far more clear in her statements, but she will not go beyond a certain point. She could tell, but won’t. My wife would, but can’t. Will you let me question you—somewhat plainly—that I may correct myself where I am wrong!”

“Ask anything, and plainly as you will. I will tell you all that I can.”

“You love my daughter, and would marry her?”

“ Yes.”

The simple answer was as effective as a more fervent protest.

“ But after to-night you cease to be your own master ? Of the remainder of your life some disposition was made before you met Angela ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I have known young men—good fellows, really—make for themselves unending trouble. Youth, hot blood, and ignorance—they do a deal of harm. Pardon me, but is there—is there another woman in the case ? ”

“ No.”

“ Has there been some previous—er—— ? ”

“ Nothing, nothing. I have never loved, nor ever shall love, any one else.”

“ I believe you. Indeed, you tell me what I expected, but I wanted to be quite sure. That finishes with woman. We come to money.”

Claudius handed Mr. Wycherley some memoranda and letters—one dated that day from the bank.

“No, no, no!” protested Mr. Wycherley.

“It’s not necessary.”

“I would rather,” said Claudius.

Mr. Wycherley examined, and his face fell.

“If all this money will not help, then the case is bad indeed.”

“No amount of money could help. The case is bad indeed. I want you also to read this. It is my will—by which I leave all unconditionally to Angela. My solicitors are also acting as my executors, and I am just returning it to them.”

Mr. Wycherley stared at the carpet. “God help her!” was all he said.

“I knew it was nothing,” said Claudius, after a pause. “All that I can do now is nothing. I shall not, at least, die happily.”

“Die? Die?” exclaimed Mr. Wycherley, suddenly. “Then you expect to die? Is that so—is it—is it?”

“I cannot tell you.”

“But I think you have told me. You leave me to work in the dark. You won’t show me the reason, the motive. If it had been woman

I could have helped you, for I was once young. If it had been money I could have helped you, for I am now old. It seems that it's neither. But I have worked in the dark before. In the City—I needn't go into it—but I have had to play the game when I did not know what the game was, or where it would end. But as I have gone on, I have found a glimmer here and a glimmer there, until at last there was light enough. I'm going to work in the dark now, for already, Mr. Sandell, I've seen the glimmer—just the faintest. Now you said that I might question you, tell me under what compulsion you agreed that within a few days you would sacrifice your life?"

"I did not guess at the time——" Claudius paused.

"Go on! Go on!" said Mr. Wycherley, excitedly; "you say that you did not guess at the time that there was an actual peril of life. However, you know it now. Go on!"

"There was no compulsion whatever. I was broken down at that time, and did not

think that my life could ever have any value for me."

"But why to this man? Why give it to him?"

"Mr. Wycherley, it's no use," said Claudius. "I beg you not to ask me any more questions. I've had no sleep, and I'm worn out. I can't think clearly, and I can't trust myself to talk. I'm so afraid of telling you things unintentionally, which I am bound in honour not to tell. Don't think me ungrateful—I am not that. You have been very kind to me when you might with justice have been only very angry."

"Yes," said Mr. Wycherley; "you look tired and ill—I had noticed that. I won't question you any further. On the contrary, instead of asking for an explanation I will give you one. I'm nothing much, you know, only a business man. But Angela is—is a good deal to me. I can't see the rest of her life spoiled, and I won't do it. Nor will I let you be murdered, because from some sense of honour (which as a business man I can't

understand) you feel yourself bound by a contract of a nature which the law doesn't allow. I've not been angry with you, though you were in the wrong to go to Guilbridge in the first place—once there, the rest was inevitable. Now, you must not be angry with me if I should seem afterwards to have interfered with you, for I am going on working."

"How? In what way?"

"It is my turn to say that I cannot tell you."

Claudius thought for a few moments. "You are justified," he said. "Mr. Wycherley, there is one more thing to say. I must tell you how sorry I am. The worst that I have to bear is that Angela should suffer; I never dreamed that she would come to care for me. My days were so few—I thought the joy and the sorrow of it would be mine alone. And now, when I think of it, and how you and her mother love her, I see that I have done the worst thing I ever did in my life. I have done a terrible thing that will weigh me down to the end. Angela will not let me ask for

forgiveness, and will not hear that there is anything to forgive. You know how much there is."

"I won't say there's nothing to forgive," said Mr. Wycherley. And then very simply and kindly he held out his hand. "But it's all right, Claudius. I believe you're a good fellow—I couldn't have wished for a better for Angela. I should be a harder man than I am if I couldn't forgive you now. I see how you're placed—if you're to be saved, it must be in spite of yourself, and in spite of you I'm going on working. When you come to-night to say good-bye to Angela, remember that she takes things hard. Don't let her think that it's the last time—that she'll never see you again. You understand, of course."

"Perfectly. Thank you, thank you very much."

It was arranged between them that Claudius was to call at Erciston Square at nine o'clock that night. He was to see Angela alone, and only Angela.

Mr. Wycherley was no sooner outside the

hotel than his work began ; and he was not, he thought, working so completely in the dark now. He remembered all that he had heard from his wife, from Angela, from Lady Verrider, from Claudius himself. He pieced his information together rapidly, and formed his conjectures. The commissionaire called a cab for him.

“Where to, sir ?” the man asked.

“Ludgate Circus,” said Mr. Wycherley.

From Ludgate Circus Mr. Wycherley had not far to go to the office of Mr. Abraham Penny’s Detective Agency. It was after six on Saturday night, but that office knows no hours. His business was simplicity itself. A young gentleman (description given) would arrive at Mr. Wycherley’s house at nine o’clock that night. He would leave it for some other house before twelve, for he had to be at this other house by twelve. Mr. Wycherley wished to know where this other house was, who its occupants were, and—and all that could be discovered about them, in fact. Mr. Wycherley would like a report to

this effect to be on his breakfast-table on Sunday morning, and would then send further instructions ; until these were received, a close watch by night and day was to be kept on that other house, and every movement of that young gentleman or of the occupants of the house was to be followed and reported to Mr. Wycherley at once ; and Mr. Wycherley hoped that there would be no difficulty.

“Difficulty?” said the assistant manager. “It’s the A B C. We see the young gentleman go into your house, and follow him when he comes out. You shall hear from us by eleven on Sunday morning, and anything that turns up further as the day goes on. You don’t want the young gentleman or his companions to suspect that they’re shadowed, and you’d like the thing to be done thoroughly?”

“Quite so. Put your best men on to it, and don’t spare expense. Want a cheque in advance, or a reference?”

“Not from you, sir,” said the assistant manager, and thereby showed his astuteness ; and he showed it further by not

putting his best men on to do work which the less good could do equally well.

Mr. Wycherley was well pleased. He had common sense, and had proved it. As he entered the omnibus that would take him nearest to Erciston Square, he smiled upon his achievement. But common sense is not the gift of prophecy, and Mr. Wycherley little knew what the next few hours were to bring forth.

"How is Angela?" he asked his wife as soon as he got home.

Mrs. Wycherley was troubled and tremulous.

"She doesn't cry any more—not since this morning. She seems to me to try to talk of other things, and cheer me up, and there's nothing breaks me down more than that, coming from her. Takes nothing—a biscuit and a glass of wine that I insisted upon, but nothing more. So she won't be down to dinner. You saw Mr. Sandell? What have you done?"

"I saw him, and I have done the right thing. Go and tell Angela that Claudius will

come to say good-bye to her at nine to-night, that I have been doing what I can, and have good reason to hope that Claudius will not be away long."

"But—one moment—before I go. What have you really done?"

"Don't tell Angela, for she'd tell Claudius, and he must not know, or it would spoil all."

"Not a word."

"I've put it in the hands of Abraham Penny."

"Penny—what Penny?"

"Private detective."

"Ah!"

And then was Mrs. Wycherley greatly comforted and refreshed. For, like most really good women, she had a faith in private detectives that never reasoned why, and could not be justified by facts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE was a little back sitting-room in the house in Erciston Square which had been known in the Wycherleys' earlier days as the library. Angela had objected that there were no books in it, and that therefore it was not a library. So Mrs. Wycherley, who could see a point very well when her attention was directed to it, decided that it should be called the breakfast-room, and issued a solemn kitchen decree to that effect. There were relapses into the use of the word "library" on the part of the housemaid—a creature of habit; Mrs. Wycherley took a strong line, and the weeping maiden obtained a fixed idea that the use of the word "library" was indecent. So the breakfast-room triumphed, and was securely established. Nobody ever breakfasted there, of course.

It was in this room, lit by two red-shaded candles on the mantelpiece, that Claudius said good-bye to Angela. The dim rose light was kind to her pale face. Claudius had no longer any hope at all in his own heart. Mr. Wycherley might attempt something: it did not much matter what he attempted; Claudius knew that Dr. Lamb would be clever enough to foresee that some such attempt might be made, and clever enough to check-mate it. Yet he spoke to Angela as if he would come back, perhaps, and she, too, spoke as one who hoped. Then at times a hard look of horror came into her soft eyes, and both were very careful not to raise the question of the purpose for which Dr. Gabriel Lamb needed Claudius Sandell.

"Remember," said Claudius, "that as long as I live I shall always be loving you."

"But not to hear you say it any more!" cried Angela. "If that should be!"

"It can't be. It can't end like this."

"Oh, Claudius, dear love, what shall I do?"

Tell me what I shall do? How shall I wait for you?"

Mrs. Wycherley had quite realized that this was an emotional hour in her house, and that for the sake of others she must bear up. To that end she took a glass of coca-wine, and found it a broken reed. The poor, silly affectionate woman loved her beautiful daughter so dearly that the thought of Angela's unhappiness made composure impossible. She was in her bedroom now, with her cap off, all sobs and *sal volatile*. The undignified love as much as the dignified. This idea of an emotional hour, this sense that there was sorrow in the house, had even permeated into the basement. Cook sniffed. The housemaid (the one who never said "library" now) observed: "It's my Sunday out to-morrow, but I shan't take it"—a dark saying, a vague, well-meant effort to get into keeping with the general atmosphere. Mr. Wycherley sat bolt upright in a straight-backed chair in the drawing-room. He held the *Times* in his hands, and thought he was reading it, and his face was solemn. He was

ready—ready and waiting. He would hear the breakfast-room door open and shut, and the front door open and shut, and the carriage drive away: and at that moment he would emerge with a most cheerful smile and take the broken, crying Angela into his arms, and he would say, “Don’t fret, Angela. It’s all right. I couldn’t tell you before, but I have taken this in hand myself, I have. To-morrow morning you shall have news of Claudius. I promise it. I absolutely promise it.” That would surely do some good.

Her parents had entrusted Angela with comforting messages for Claudius and with their farewells. The messages were easily delivered: the rest was difficult.

“And as they will not see you to-night, and it may be long before they see you again, they asked me to say—Oh, Claudius, I don’t want to say good-bye!”

Her breast heaved and her lips trembled. Claudius drew her to him and kissed her again and again. Neither of them spoke any more now until the moment when Claudius left the

house. He could hardly see, his head swam, he staggered like a man that has been drugged.

Hardly had he flung himself back in his carriage before he fell asleep. Nature was exhausted. He did not wake until the carriage entered the drive before Dr. Lamb's house. Waking, he wondered where he was, for he had dreamed that he was back at home. Then he remembered. He pulled out his watch and glanced at the time. It still wanted ten minutes to twelve.

He got out, and just as he was on the point of ringing the bell, paused, changed his mind, and turned round.

"You can put my portmanteau down," he said; "you needn't wait."

"Very good, sir," the man replied.

There were still a few minutes of freedom left. Claudius clung to them.

The coachman hesitated before driving off. Claudius had been very liberal—after all it might be as well to mention what he had noticed.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I'm not sure if you know we've been followed?"

"Followed?"

"Yes, sir. I noticed a hansom hanging about when I was waiting in Erciston Square. As soon as I drove off the cab followed. It kept behind me all the way, and when I turned in here, went on a few yards and then stopped. It's there now."

"Any one in the cab?"

"Two men, sir. I only got a glimpse. Common-looking they seemed."

"Thanks. You were quite right to tell me, though I don't know that it's of much importance."

The carriage drove off. Claudius stood beside his luggage with his watch in his hand. After all, then, he supposed, Dr. Lamb had not trusted him, and had put detectives on to follow him. The black shrubberies stood out clear against the pale sky; a breath of wind woke and rustled and fell again. All was absolutely still. In a moment Claudius put his watch back in his pocket and rang the bell;

the sound spoke out, resonant, far back in the house.

And immediately the door opened, almost before the bell sounded. It was opened slowly, and not to the full extent—not as Francis opened it. Mrs. Lamb stood there. She was bare-footed, and in her nightdress; her hair hung loose about her shoulders; her eyes were wild and roaming; she spoke in a horrible whisper.

“I’ve been waiting behind the door for you. I got up and crept out, and they never knew.”

She shivered in the chill night air. Behind her was a chaos of packing-cases. The carpets were up in the hall and on the stairs. The house looked naked. A gas-jet flared without a globe.

“Mrs. Lamb,” Claudius began. He was going to persuade her to go in, poor mad woman, but she would not let him speak.

“There is no time. Listen quickly, before they come and take me. I have been sent by Heaven to save you. You are to go away at

once, and you must never come here again." She pointed to the passage that led to the study and laboratory. "Gabriel's in there—not the angel Gabriel, but the devil Gabriel. He's getting ready to kill you, sharpening knives. Every night I can hear him sharpen knives, though he does not want me to hear. Always sharpening knives. It goes like this—b-r-r-r-r—b-r-r-r-r." She made a hideous guttural imitation of the sound of a grindstone.

At the same moment a door opened, and a woman in a plaid dressing-gown came out. She had a cloak over one arm, and she said quietly, "Mrs. Lamb, you must come back to bed." Hilda Lamb flung herself down on the floor of the hall, kicking and screaming. The nurse was a big woman, with a not unkindly face. She would not let Claudius help her, and indeed she needed no help; her strength was enormous. She wrapped Mrs. Lamb in the cloak, lifted her and carried her off. Then Claudius saw that the servant Francis was standing waiting at the further end of the hall.

He now came forward, greeted Claudius respectfully, and began to carry in the luggage.

“Dr. Lamb is in the study, sir,” he said.

“My dear Sandell,” said the doctor, cordially, coming forward as Sandell entered, “welcome to a half-empty and exceedingly uncomfortable home. I trust that you have been enjoying yourself in your absence.”

Claudius shook hands mechanically, thanked him mechanically, and sat down.

“The octave is over. *Lusisti satis*—how does it go? *Tempus abire tibi est*. You will notice the preparations for departure everywhere here. Indeed, had all been well, we should have gone aboard the yacht on Sunday afternoon. But there has been a sudden change in my wife’s mental condition. I’m afraid that when you came in just now you heard——”

“I saw Mrs. Lamb. The nurse took her back into her room. Believe me, I am very sorry.”

“Well, this change, though not uninterest-

ing from one point of view, is, of course, exceedingly sad, and it has altered my plans slightly. My wife cannot possibly come with us now, and I have not yet finished the arrangements for her remaining in England. It may be Monday before we can start."

"Where are we going?"

"Sandell, I own you now. I do not want to insist on that ownership more than is necessary for my purpose, and I cannot bring myself to give you an order like a servant. But I ask you, for your own sake, not to put questions to me about the future. Do not ask me where my yacht will take you. Do not ask what I am going to do with you."

Sandell looked the doctor straight in the eyes.

"I know very well what you are going to do with me," he said.

"You believe," said the doctor, "that I intend to use you for the subject of experiment. And yet you keep your word—well, I was sure you would."

"You were sure?" Claudius said. "Yet I

have been followed by your detectives to-night right up to your house."

"My good Sandell, I have never employed a private detective in my life. I should think it dishonourable, and it has the additional disadvantage of being almost always useless—they are far from clever, that class, as a rule. At the same time I can readily believe that you were followed here, and that you are being shadowed now. I can believe that there may be some one in London who has sufficient interest in you to be suspicious of your mysterious disappearance at a time when I understand you have every reason for not disappearing. Is that not so?"

Claudius remembered that Mr. Wycherley had said that he would work on his own account and in the dark. He saw it all now.

"I think you are right—I did you an injustice. I believe I know now who sent them. I have no doubt he believed he was acting in my interests, but it was done without my knowledge and authority. I should not have thought that I had any right to

interfere with you in that way. Shall I tell you who I think sent them?"

"No," said the doctor, "I don't think his name would interest me. He can do nothing, of course. His very smart people will hardly come aboard my yacht. They're amusing to watch for a short time, but I don't propose to allow them to take a voyage with me."

"Sandell," the doctor added, after a pause in which Claudius had not replied to him, "you look very tired and broken-down. You are also very depressed. I will not keep you here much longer, for you need sleep. But there is one thing I want to say. You have done me one injustice to-night (perfectly trivial, as it happened), and I am afraid that you also do me another injustice. You doubt my humanity. There was a time when you regarded me as a good Samaritan; you now regard me as a murdering devil. The reaction has set in, and, possibly, it has been assisted by the chatter of that mad woman. I heard her talking to you. Now I cannot let you suspect my humanity, and partly for that reason, and

partly because I really trust you, I will change my mind and tell you what I have arranged. You are, of course, to be the subject of experiment."

Claudius Sandell looked steadily and contemptuously at the doctor.

"I do not mean it in any offensive sense," the doctor continued, "when I say that you are of no practical use to me for any other purpose. I value your good opinion as I am now showing, and have always found you a most pleasant and interesting companion."

"If I were not yours absolutely, and had any right to suggest, I should suggest that we pass over this part."

"My dear fellow, do not be so humble or so bad-tempered. I am not Legree in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' You can suggest anything you like, and be sure that your suggestions will always be considered with respect, and adopted wherever it is possible. I do not bask and revel in villainy, and for the purposes of melodrama I am useless. Your attitude towards me hurts me. For days and nights I

have been planning how to make everything as easy as possible for you."

"Shall we pass over that also?"

"Certainly, in one moment. I want to tell you how things stand. When the time comes I shall ask you to allow me to administer an anæsthetic. After a time you will regain consciousness. Then from thirty to fifty seconds you will suffer. The anæsthetic will be administered again immediately." The doctor paused.

"And when I regain consciousness the second time?"

The doctor lit a cigar, blew out the match, and flung it into the grate. "You will not regain consciousness a second time. That will be—in fact, that will be all."

"That is why you are leaving England?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "There is no privacy in England," he said. "But I ask you to notice that the very most you have to fear is fifty seconds of suffering—probably not acute. All the lurid pictures that your imagination may have conjured up, or my

wife in her madness may have depicted, may be dismissed from your mind. I am emphatically a humane man. If it were not for my humanity, for my broad love of the race, for my infinite longing that some future generation might be born, not under the curse which weighs us down, but free and masters of their fate—I would not even ask you for that little thing, your life.”

Again Claudius made no reply.

“Until that moment comes when I begin the experiment, your comfort shall be my first consideration; no indignity shall be put upon you; except for that one purpose, and what is connected with it, you are free.”

“I have a considerable fortune,” said Claudius.

“I am afraid,” said the doctor, “that I cannot consent to accept gratuities.”

“You had already told me that money was of no consideration with you. I was not intending to repeat my offer to buy myself from you. I wanted to ask if I were free to

dispose of my money now, and to will it after my death, as I wish ? ”

“ Absolutely — perfectly free.”

“ And I may write letters ? ”

“ Certainly — any letters which do not prejudice my main purpose. After we leave England you will omit the address, of course.”

“ Thank you,” said Claudius. “ I have only one more question—is there any consideration whatever which would induce you to terminate our agreement : any consideration apart from money ? ”

“ I had thought that you would be likely to ask the question, and I have no objection to it. My answer is—none, absolutely none.”

At that moment Francis entered.

“ The nurse would like to speak to you for a moment, sir.”

“ Excuse me,” said the doctor, and went out.

Claudius leant forward with his head in his hands ; he felt how easy it would be to fall asleep and to forget.

In a moment or two the doctor returned.

"The nurse," he said, "seems to think that some one should sit up with my wife to-night. It cannot be done. The nurse has not been to bed for two nights, and it would be barbarous to keep her up a third night unless it were absolutely necessary, and I do not think it is. Fortunately I have to be up all night myself. I have something in the laboratory which requires watching, and I shall be here until six. With the door open I shall hear any sound. My wife sleeps downstairs now, you know."

"Yes?" said Claudius, hardly conscious of what had been said.

"Yes. It is her idea that her dead baby crawls about upstairs, and would disturb her rest. At any rate, she will not sleep upstairs."

Claudius rose from his chair. "May I go to bed now?" he said. "I am so tired that I am not very good company."

"Certainly. I hope you'll find your room comfortable. Francis will get anything you want. Whisky-and-soda before you go? No? Ah, Claudius, I am sorry I can't give you my

philosophy, and I won't insult you by trying ! Everybody has the philosophy which is suitable to the situation of somebody else. My philosophy is the very thing for a man in your situation. Well, well—good night."

"May I make one request?"

"Again this Legree business—do, please, ask for anything you want," said the doctor a little irritably.

"I want you to begin this experiment as soon as possible. To wait for it—that is hard to do."

"Be assured," smiled the doctor, suavely, "that I also am impatient. Good night again—sleep well, and breakfast just when you happen to feel like it."

Claudius left the room, and went upstairs without a word.

The doctor went on composedly with his work, and two hours slipped by. He had grown drowsy, and, leaning forward with his head on his arms, fell into a doze. He often found that half-an-hour's sleep snatched in this way made a great difference to him, and sent

him back to his work as fresh and energetic as ever.

And as he slept, pit-pat, pit-pat, across the stone floor of the hall came the sound of naked feet. Past the bare hall, where the windows had stared like lidless eyes since the curtains were packed away, and unfaded patches stood where pictures had been, and the naked gas-light flared — past the hall and down the passage came Hilda Lamb, quiet and cunning as a cat, with all hell awake in her mad eyes. She opened the study door softly ; she smiled when she saw that the doctor was asleep.

Without a sound she passed through into the laboratory and switched on the electric light. She opened the big mahogany case of instruments, and was careful not to let the click of steel be heard. She took what she wanted, switched off the light, and came back into the studio again. The bright edge of the thing she held in her hand attracted her attention. “B-r-r-r-r, b-r-r-r-r, b-r-r-r-r,” she said in her throat, imitating the sound of the grindstone. Doctor Lamb began to move

his head. In a moment she flung herself upon him, and thrust and hacked and pulled.

* * * * *

A storm came into the dream that Claudius dreamed that night. The forked lightning split the sky, the thunder cracked and roared. Below were people with white, frightened faces—a dense mass of people, all looking upward. They began to howl with terror, waving their arms. The dream suddenly ceased, and Claudius was awake.

He was awake, and the room was filled with smoke. Some one was knocking violently at the door and crying to him to get up. “Fire! fire!”

And some one outside in the garden was singing—a poor mad woman that had been rescued from the merciful fire. The servants of the house watched her in awe-struck silence as she was dragged away, ceasing her singing from time to time and fighting hard to get back to the flames.

The fire had broken out in the annexe—in the doctor’s study. This was completely

wrecked before the arrival of the engines. The main body of the building was damaged but not ruined. In the grey, early dawn the police on watch talked confidentially among themselves. "I saw her myself," said one of them, "and there was blood both on her hands and face. It'll be Broadmoor."

At a little distance from the house Claudius stood alone on the road and looked towards London. A four-wheeled cab lumbered slowly up, and Francis, who had gone to Wimbledon to order it, jumped down from the box.

"It's the best they could do, sir."

"Thanks," said Claudius, as he got in. "It will do very well. Tell him to drive as quickly as he can."

"Yes, sir. Where to, sir?"

"Erciston Square."

Francis shut the carriage door. "Erciston Square," he echoed, as he seated himself beside the driver again.

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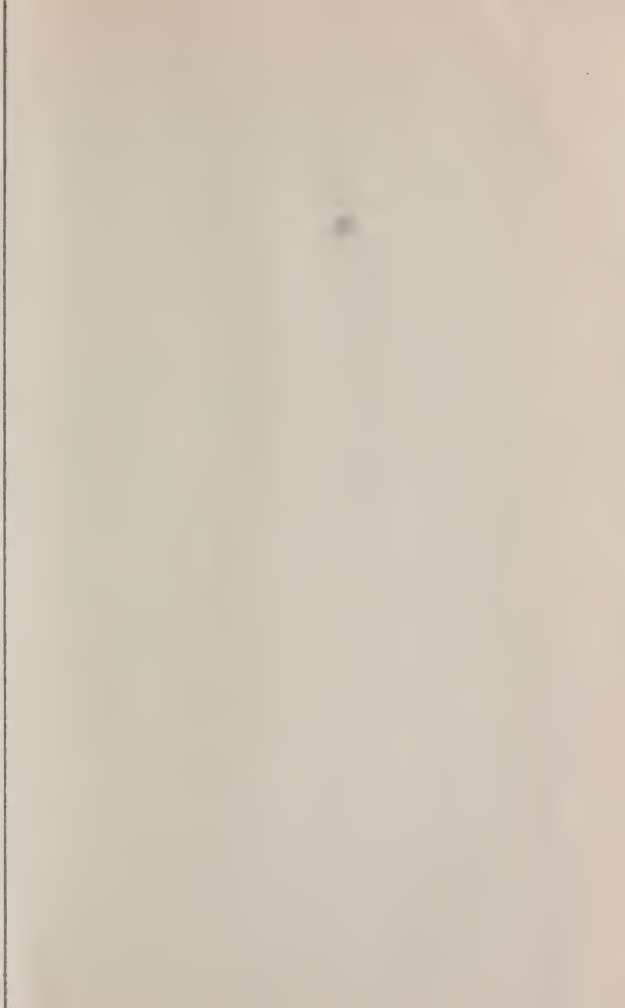
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